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OR, THE WINNING HAND.

A Story of How a Carpenter Made
His Way in the World.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "JOHN ARMSTRONG, MECHANIC."

CHAPTER I. THE BROKEN RAIL.

ON a certain afternoon in July, not many years ago, a young tramp was trudging along between the tracks of a certain railroad, with his face set resolutely toward the great West, when his attention was suddenly attracted by the sound of a sharp snap and a metallic ring close by him, so that he ejaculated:

"What was that?"

He was a tall, well-built young fellow, with a handsome face; and his dress was by no means so poor as to justify his present method of travel, on foot, with his kit in a bundle on a long stick.

"What was that?" he repeated to himself.
"Sounded very like a rail breaking."

"IT IS YOU," SAID JOHN, IN A VOICE TREMBLING WITH ANGER, "IT IS YOU WHO HAVE SET UP ALL THIS TROUBLE FOR ME."

And he began to look sharply along the rails on both sides as if he had been a track-walker, till he suddenly exclaimed again:

"There it is. I thought so."

By one of those sudden freaks of which steel gives so many examples in practice, a Bessemer rail, that had some hidden imperfection in its casting, had, all of a sudden, snapped nearly in two in the interval between two ties, rendering it certain that the next train to pass would break it completely and get thrown from the track, if no worse.

The young tramp looked all round him, and up and down the track. He could not see very far ahead of him on account of a curve, but as far as the view extended behind him, a distance of at least ten miles, no train was in sight, and the track was lonely and solitary.

And there is no place, generally, so lonely to a foot traveler as a great railroad in one of its long stretches from town to town.

This young tramp looked down at the broken rail and began to soliloquize:

"I wonder what broke that! I've heard of the frost doing such things; but this is July, and the weather's hot enough to half kill a fellow."

He did not speak like a regular tramp, though he was obliged to walk all the way from the borders of Pennsylvania to the city of Chicago, having not enough of money to pay his fare, and he wiped his brow as he spoke with a handkerchief made of silk, that looked as if it had once been pretty, though shabby now.

"Well, what am I to do?" he went on to himself. "If I pass on, and a train comes before the trackman sees it, there will be a pretty bad accident here."

Which was true! for the road, at that point where he was, crossed a little valley about fifty feet deep, and the rails were laid at the top of a steep embankment, the broken rail being not three feet from the edge of the highest place.

"They're bound to go over, if you can't stop here till the trackman comes," the young man went on to himself. "They're bound to go over and have a fearful accident, if you can't stop them, John Ray. And how the deuce am I to do it? Suppose a train comes up now, how shall I stop it? A red flag? I haven't got one—Hark!"

The faint distant shriek, in a patch of forest a good ten miles away, in the direction from which he had come, caused him to start.

"By heavens! the train is coming from New Canterbury, and there's no flagman in sight! What am I to do? I haven't so much as a scrap of red in my kit. Even my spare shirt is blue. And there she is."

As he spoke, far away over the gently rolling plain, behind the dark woods, he saw a little patch of the silvery hue that shines so brilliantly when the sun strikes on it.

"The train's coming! I'll have to stop here and wave my coat; anything, so long as I attract attention and stop it."

The young man began to look nervous and excited.

The silvery white patch of steam was plainly outlined on the dark olive gray of the woods in the far distance. At the long interval it seemed to move slowly, but he knew well enough that it was coming toward him at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour.

And the track was down-grade for half the distance, so that he could watch the approach of the train.

He took off his coat, and began to move it to and fro regularly, but the train came on at the same pace.

"They don't see me, or else they won't stop for me," he said to himself. "I wonder what's the reason they don't do something or other?"

As if to answer his question, the engineer of the coming train blew a long blast on his whistle, and kept sounding it in puffs that alternated with long notes, and screamed, as plainly as an engine could scream:

"Get-out-of-the-way-y-y-y?"

"I won't!" yelled back the young tramp, excitedly, as if he had heard the words plainly. "I won't get out of the way. I'll stop you if I die for it."

And he began to dance to and fro on the track, frantically waving his coat, the distant train all the while shrieking out its long warnings and coming on faster than ever.

Already it had cleared the forest in the distance, rushed down the grade to a point some five miles off, where it began to climb again, and he could plainly hear the regular pulsing of the steam in the piston, as the iron horse galloped along, coming straight to destruction, as he knew.

On it came, up the grade to the little hill which bordered the valley in which he was, and he waved his coat more wildly than ever, standing full in the middle of the track, as if determined to be run over.

The engineer blew the whistle for a fourth and fifth time, ending in a long scream that caused the tramp to ejaculate:

"Down brakes at last! Thank God!"

But he would not get out of the track, for fear the engineer should change his mind.

So far from that, he ran toward the train,

waving his arms and screaming at the top of his voice:

"Stop! Stop!"

He heard the grinding of the air-brakes, felt the tremulous motion of the rails as the heavy train made everything shake, and then came a great groaning and growling, as the huge machine came to a sudden stop, and then—

"Snap! TWANG!"

The injured rail, feeling the new strain, flew up in the air at one end, and remained sticking there, pointing toward the saved train, and answering with mute eloquence the profane and irate query of the engineer, who yelled from his box to the man who had saved the train:

"Dod-rot your skin, you consarned lummix! what d'ye mean by stoppin' this train? I've a—"

And then his speech was checked in its further development by the loud report of the broken rail, and his face, that had been as red as fire with anger, changed to a serious pallor as he added, hastily:

"By gum! I take it all back. That were a narrer squeak."

Indeed it was; for the air-brakes had stopped the train so that the pilot was not ten feet from the broken rail, which tilted up straight toward the engine in a way that would have certainly ripped open the side of the boiler, and with equal certainty have sent the whole train rolling down the embankment.

The engineer, a stout, thick-set man, with a mustache of such intense black as to suggest the dyer, a fighting chin, and a general appearance of reckless daring, was nevertheless quite subdued, as he looked at the danger he had escaped.

The fireman, a long, thin man with a mangy red beard, got down from his place to see what was the matter, and, as soon as his eyes fell on the spiky rail, ejaculated, as had the other:

"By gum! That were a narrer squeak!"

Then people began to put their heads out of the car windows, young men jumped off the steps and ran up to see what the train had stopped for; and in the midst of it all came the conductor, looking flurried and angry at the loss of time, ready to scold any and everybody, till his eyes fell on the broken rail, when he too said:

"By Jove, that was a narrow squeak!"

Then he turned to the young tramp, and asked him:

"Was it you, waving your coat to stop the train? I thought you were crazy, and we were very near running over you."

"I'm the man," returned the young fellow, cheerfully. "I heard the rail snap half-way across, and your train coming, and the track-walker was not in sight, so I thought I'd do what I could to prevent an accident. I hope you're not offended."

"Offended!" echoed the conductor. "I should be a fine pill if I was offended. Why, you've saved the train. What's your name, friend?"

"John Ray," returned the young man, with a sort of apologetic smile. Then he added, rather nervously: "I say, if you please, do you think I could get a lift, when the train goes on, for a few stations? I'm going to Chicago, you know, and I'm pretty hard up—and so—"

The conductor eyed him critically and then nodded gruffly.

"Reckon so. Say, young fellow, you don't know what you have done to-day. This is a special train. Come, lend a hand, and help us, and maybe you won't be sorry you flagged this train."

The crowd of gazers, coming from the rear of the train, thickened every moment, and at last a tall young man, with a blonde mustache, curling upward, and a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses, pushed to the front of the group, asking in a tone of imperious inquiry:

"What the deuce is the matter here, Jones? What are you stopping for? Mr. Wallis is in a hurry, and wants to get on."

"Mr. Wallis will have to wait, the same as the rest," returned Conductor Jones, rather sullenly. "Can't you see what is the matter, Mr. Percy? Look at that rail. We shall have to send on to the next station to repair it before we can pass, and then it will be a three hours' wait before they can get here."

The young man with the eye-glasses and upturned mustache looked at the rail in his turn, uttered a low whistle and a profane ejaculation, then turned away and went back, while the stout engineer muttered:

"Much you know about it, if you air the president's son. Them fellows make me sick, Jonesy."

To which Jones, the conductor, made no answer but sending off a brakeman ahead and astern, with red flags, to prevent further accidents.

"See here," remarked John Ray to the engineer, after they had waited a little while for the man who had been sent ahead for a plate-layer, "why don't we fish the rail ourselves and go on?"

"Fish the rail, indeed! I'd like to know how you're goin' to do that?" asked the engineer, a little testily. "My name's Jack Miller, and I don't give in to no man on railroading; but I

don't see how you're goin' to fish a broken rail with no fish-plates, no holes fur bolts; nc nothin'. Mebbe you kin teach Jack Miller, young feller?"

"I don't want to teach anybody," said the young man, quietly; "but I think I could get this train over that rail if I tried very hard."

Conductor Jones, who had been staring ruefully at the rail, waiting for the repairing engine to come, looked up at the tramp who had saved the train with new interest, remarking:

"If you can do it, do it. Are you a man-chin?"

The young fellow flushed slightly.

"No. I—that is—I'm a carpenter by trade, but I'm a bit of an inventor in my way, and I think I could get the train over that gap with a little trouble."

"I tell you what it is, Ray," said Jones, energetically, "you do it, and if you don't ride free to Chicago this time, and many another, it will be because my name ain't Abner Jones. What d'ye want?"

"Got any timber aboard?" asked the young tramp. "I want a couple of timbers to bolt down the sleepers for a guide, and a sledge to level that rail."

Then the baggage-master remembered that they had some beams lying by the sides of the baggage-car, not very large and heavy, but enough for John Ray's purpose, as he announced when he saw them! Axes and sledges are common on trains, with other tools, and in a very short time John Ray had the broken rail pried back into its place, the division supported by blocks of wood cut from the short sliding beams of the baggage-car, and to all appearance smooth and capable of bearing the weight of a single car.

"Now," said John, to the engineer, "you back out fifty feet, disconnect and come back alone. If you get over, it will stand all the rest safe enough."

"But if I don't get over?" quoth Jack, dryly.

"How about that, young feller?"

"You will get over. I'll stake my life on it. If you don't, you'll have to wait till the rail is replaced, and that will take a long time."

Miller shook his head.

"I know iron, and I trust it, but I'm durned if I believe that 'ere wood's goin' to stand the racket."

Here Jones, the conductor, interrupted him with the remark:

"Let her rip, Jack. We may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb. I'll go back and ask old Wallis whether to try it on or not."

He went off to the second car from the smoker, and soon came back, signaling the engine to go on.

A few minutes later the train backed, the engine was disconnected from the rest of the cars, ran slowly forward, passed safely over the broken rail in triumph, and before the repair car could arrive at the scene of the late trouble, Conductor Jones pulled the bell-cord to go ahead, and said to the young man who had saved them:

"You come along. Mr. Wallis wants to see you."

CHAPTER II.

RICH AND POOR.

So saying, the conductor led the way through the baggage-car and smoker, to a large and sumptuous carriage, of a different construction from the rest; where the interior resembled a gorgeous saloon; where tables were laid for dinner as if in a hotel; where black waiters glided to and fro among groups of well-dressed people to take orders; and where John Ray, in his worn, shabby clothing, felt decidedly ill at ease.

The conductor took him across the saloon to a place where a little parlor had been separated from the rest of the car, looked in at the door, and said:

"This is the young man, sir."

Then John Ray found himself, with a consciousness that his face was red with confusion, standing, hat in hand, before a party of three people, of whom one was a young lady, all of whom were surveying him with curiosity, and one of them, at least, with some derision.

This was the tall young man with the upturned mustache and the gold-rimmed glasses, whom John had seen before, and who answered to the name of Percy. The youth had put up his glasses to survey the other's figure from head to foot in a most supercilious manner, and the upward curl of his artificially-trained mustache assisted the impression made on John that Percy was sneering at him.

The second person was a stout old gentleman, with a hard, shrewd face, mutton-chop whiskers of white, and undisguised spectacles, over which he was staring at John with a frowning intentness that awed the young man as much as Percy's rude scrutiny irritated him.

The third inmate of the little parlor was a young lady, of whom John was only sensible that she was—to his eyes—as beautiful as an angel, with big dark eyes and the palest of blonde hair, and that she alone, of the three, looked at him as if he were a human being, toward whom she felt kindly.

"That's Mr. Wallis, John," whispered the conductor, indicating the old gentleman with a nod as he backed out of the room, and then Mr. Wallis said, in a hard, inquisitorial kind of way:

"What's your name, young man?"

He spoke in the tone of a millionaire, addressing a poor man, as if he were doing a great favor.

"My name is John Ray, sir," replied the young man, drawing himself up a little; for the way he was being treated made him rather angry. "You're Senator Wallis, I presume."

The old gentleman looked at him in a way that conveyed some rebuke as he answered dryly:

"I am. Well, John, and what were you doing on the track when we found you there?"

He spoke in a way that implied a good deal more than was said. It was evident that he had resolved to treat John as an inferior, and the young man was equally resolved not to be so treated, if he could help it.

So he answered, as dryly as the senator had spoken:

"I was walking to Chicago."

"Indeed? And how did you find the broken rail?"

"By using my eyes and ears, sir."

"And why did you signal the train to stop, John?"

John stared at him.

"Why? Good heavens, man, where would you have been if I hadn't?"

"I didn't ask you that. I asked you why you stopped the train? Was it for the expectation of a reward?"

John flushed slightly, and looked at his interrogator rather sternly.

"No; it was not," he answered.

Whereupon young Percy, who had been tilting back in a rocking-chair, watching John ever since he came in, smiled derisively, while the young lady looked a little scared at the anger in the young man's face.

"You want to know why I stopped the train, do you, senator?" he went on, in a sharp, excited way. "I'll tell you why in a moment. I stopped it because I knew that if I didn't the whole train would have gone down a fifty-foot embankment in ten seconds after it struck that broken rail. I stopped it because I'd seen a sight like that before, with the cars all on fire, and the passengers roasting to death, broken bones and all. All the reward I was looking for was a lift to Chicago, and that I'm getting. Any more questions to ask, sir?"

He stood upright and looked rather fiercely down into the face of the old gentleman, who, on his part, seemed to be rather disgusted at his freedom. As the young man finished, however, Senator Wallis observed:

"Well, well, you needn't be so touchy about it. You've done a good action, and deserve something. Have you any trade?"

"I'm a carpenter," returned John, in a gruff sort of way. "Sometimes I do a little wood-carving."

"Then what were you going to Chicago for?"

"To look for work in the car-factory, sir. I hear there's a deal of carving to be done, and I thought I might get a chance."

The old senator took off his glasses to inspect the young man more closely, and asked him:

"What? Can you carve in wood?"

"I think I can say I can, sir."

The old gentleman looked round the room till his eye fell on a bracket at the side supporting a vase of flowers, with a rack round it to keep it from falling from the motion of the train.

The bracket was prettily carved, and represented the head of a stag, whose horns formed the stays for the flower-vase above.

"Can you do as well as that?" asked the senator, dryly, indicating the bracket to the young man as a sort of hopeless achievement to set before him.

John Ray walked up to it and looked at it closely, when he said, quietly:

"I think I could beat it, sir, if I had a good chance, but there's not much carving work to be got nowadays."

"You think you could beat that?" asked the senator, incredulously. "Oh, come, come. If you could carve like that, you wouldn't have been tramping to Chicago. You could get work anywhere at good wages."

John's eyes sparkled.

"Could I, sir? I didn't know it was worth much to do that kind of thing. I've done it since I was a boy. See here, sir."

As he spoke, without a thought of what he was doing, he began to untie his little bundle, when Percy, with an ill-natured laugh, remarked:

"We don't want any revelations of your wardrobe, young man. We can dispense with that."

John Ray flushed scarlet as he glanced at the young lady, but she was looking at him as kindly as ever, and it was in soft, flute-like tones that she now broke in:

"Don't be so severe, Percy. He is going to show us some specimens of carving."

"That is just it, madam," said John, gratefully. "I beg your pardon for being so free,

but here is something which will show you whether I can carve or not. Hope you will like it, madam."

As he spoke, he fished out of the bottom of his bundle, where it had been wrapped in the end of a blue flannel shirt, a small piece of wood-carving that caused the young lady to exclaim:

"Oh, papa, isn't that pretty? A bear and her cubs, isn't it, Mr. Ray?"

Mr. Ray!

The young lady had called him *Mr.* as if he were her equal, and John felt inclined to fall down, then and there, and worship her, though he only said:

"Yes, madam. I saw them once in the woods of Pike county that way, and I shall never forget it. The old bear very nearly killed me for getting too near to them, and I didn't have so much as a gun with me."

"And how did you get away?" asked she, with a full glance of her dark eyes into his own that made him tremble with some strange feeling he did not clearly understand.

"I didn't get away, madam," he answered, simply. "The old bear clawed me up a little, but before she could finish me, Silas Briggs killed her with a rifle bullet, and we took the cubs home."

While she was speaking, her father had been closely examining the little group which was carved in black walnut, and represented the old she bear playing with her cubs, in a very natural way.

Now he suddenly turned to John Ray, and said, inquiringly:

"Are you *sure* you can do as good work as this *all the time*, young man?"

"Yes," responded John, stiffly, for the suspicious tones grated on him.

"Then, as soon as you get to Chicago, take this card to the superintendent of my works, and tell him I want him to put you on at once," said the senator, in a lordly way, handing a card to the young carpenter. "There, that'll do. No thanks. Good-day."

And he turned again to his paper, as if John Ray were a fly on the wall, while young Percy said, hastily:

"Good-day, young man. The conductor will tell you where to go."

Then he turned to his paper also, and Jasper stood fingering the card he had just received, when the young lady said:

"Would you have any objection, sir, to selling that little group to me? I should like to have it very much."

The old senator looked up from his paper and grunted:

"Want to buy that thing—eh? What d'ye ask for it, young man? Give ye ten dollars for it."

John shook his head.

"It is not for sale, sir."

The young lady looked disappointed, and asked wistfully:

"What! Won't you sell it to me?"

"No, madam," said John, quietly. "I will not sell it to you."

"You won't get a better offer, if that is what you're after," interrupted Percy, with a sneer. "Miss Wallis doesn't want it so badly as all that."

"Indeed I do," she retorted. "I wish you wouldn't interfere, Stephen. Look here, Mr. Ray, I'll give you whatever you ask for that group. I want it."

"And I have already told you it is not for sale to any man, much less to you, Miss Wallis," said the young man, with a faint smile. "But since you really want it, there is only one thing for me to do. Oblige me by taking it and keeping it, as an offering of gratitude to—to your father, we will say, for giving me a place in his factory."

As he spoke he laid the little group on the table before her, and drew back to the door, when the young lady in her turn colored slightly and said:

"Oh, I cannot think of it, indeed. Why, this must have cost you a week's work at least. I must pay for it."

"If you wish for it, madam," he retorted, looking her full in the face, "you must take it at my terms. The group is not for sale; but, if you will accept it, it is yours."

"I'm sure you're very kind," she said, in a low tone, while her father grunted:

"Ah, very good, very good. Very proper feeling in the young man. He shall not repent it, Edith. I'll see that he is put where his work will tell. There, there, young man, my daughter will take it, and very much obliged. Don't forget to give that card to Mr. Welby, the superintendent of the works. Good-day, good-day. Don't leave the door open."

And this hint of dismissal being too unmistakable to be longer evaded, John Ray bowed himself out and found the conductor waiting for him in the saloon car, to whom he told what had happened and received the cheering intelligence:

"Good for you. Your fortune's made."

No sooner was he fairly out of hearing than Stephen Percy said in a tone of some ill nature:

"I must say I don't admire your taste, Miss Edith."

"In what?" she asked, turning on him her brown eyes with surprise. "In the craving, do you mean? I'm sure you can't deny it's beautiful."

He looked at the little group with a sneer as he answered:

"Pretty well for a country lout, but I don't mean that."

"Then what do you mean?" she asked, looking him full in the face, while her shrewd, worldly old father turned over a leaf of his paper and gave a dry sniff as he said:

"Quarreling again? What's the matter now, Edith?"

"Oh, nothing, only Stephen's too fond of criticising me and I won't stand it any more," she retorted, sharply. "He doesn't seem to like me to be civil to any one, even a poor fellow, like that, who's saved all our lives."

"That's just what I thought you'd say," interrupted Percy, with another sneer. "Saved our lives, indeed? I wouldn't be surprised but what that fellow broke the rail himself on purpose to get a free ride. He has the regular hangdog look of a professional tramp about him; but you're so confoundedly romantic, Edith, that you're ready to fall down and worship every man that comes along who gets up a pretty story for your sympathy."

"I don't know what you mean," she retorted, still more sharply. "I know that he is a handsome, intellectual man, a great deal above his apparent condition, and that he presented me his handiwork with the grace of a true-born artist. You seem to take a pleasure in sneering at every one who is not as rich as yourself. One would actually think you were jealous of every handsome young man that crossed my path."

He turned pale and bit his lip with a painfully writhing sort of smile as he said:

"Thank you. Very much obliged to you, I'm sure. Jealous of a tramp! Thank you, Miss Edith."

And he began to turn over the leaves of a magazine with ill-disguised irritation; for he was one of those self-conceited and irritably vain young men who can hardly bear the least rebuke, while the girl, on her part, turned away to look out of the window, and old Senator Wallis, after a sharp glance over his spectacles at the pair, observed in a very dry tone:

"Quarreling again, and as usual about nothing. Percy, you'd better go and have a smoke. You don't know this girl as I do. Give her her head and you can do anything. Curb her in, and she'll smash the buggy. Go and smoke a cigar, my boy."

CHAPTER III.

PUT OFF.

MR. STEPHEN PERCY's manner showed strong symptoms of irritation as he took the senator's advice and strolled through the train to find the smoking-car. He was, as every one might see, a very conceited young man, and he hated to see any one attracting any sort of attention while he was around.

And here was this young stranger—a mere tramp at that—called a "handsome, intellectual man, above his station," and called this by Miss Edith Wallis, only daughter and heiress of the richest man of the West, to whom moreover, Mr. Percy was already more than half engaged to be married.

Therefore, it was by no means to be wondered at that Mr. Percy was in a decidedly irritable mood as he entered the smoking-car; and what he saw there did not tend to restore his good temper, for he found the tramp the center of an admiring group, who were questioning him and listening to his answers with a great deal of interest. The young man lighted a cigar and puffed angrily, affecting a haughty indifference to the presence of John Ray, till his attention was attracted by an old gentleman, with the most respectable of gray beards and a clean upper lip, who said to him:

"Quite an interesting case, this young man's, Mr. Percy. Have you heard his story?"

"No," returned Percy, shortly. "Is he a prince in disguise, or what? You gentlemen of Congress are always finding out geniuses, I believe, Mr. Billings."

Mr. Billings smiled as he answered:

"Well, to tell the truth, he seems to be a real genius. He has received a good education, to judge from his language, yet he doesn't seem to be very well off in this world's goods. I think we ought to take up a collection in the train for him to give him a fair start. Will you head the list?"

"No," returned Percy, dryly. "I don't trust him. It seems rather queer he should be the only man to find out that rail, and stop the train. He's getting all he deserves in the free ride. I don't believe in encouraging tramps."

Then he went and sat down near John, to whom he presently said:

"Where were you born, young man?"

"In Pennsylvania, young man," the late tramp returned, with a slight flush; "in a place where they taught me that men should be rated for their brains, not their money."

"Indeed!" retorted Percy, with a sneer. "Then in your part of the country a tramp is as good as any one, I suppose?"

"Well," said John, slowly, "that depends on what he tramps for. He may be too lazy to work. We don't respect such a man. He may be honestly looking for work. We help such a man along, and we never insult his poverty."

"And which class are you now supposed to belong to?" asked Percy, with a still broader sneer.

"To neither," returned John, quietly. "I was a tramp a few hours ago, looking for work. Now I'm going to Chicago on a pass, the same as the committee of Congress you are entertaining in this very train, Mr. Percy."

Percy looked at him sulkily. The rest of the people in the car had drawn off, seeing the obvious ill-temper of the young millionaire, and had left him to settle affairs with the tramp.

"I tell you what it is," he said at last, in a low tone. "I don't trust you as much as some of the other people on this train, and I've a good mind to have you arrested on suspicion. You are not exactly what you pretend to be, and I suspect you to be a confidence man."

John looked him full in the eye.

"Do you pretend to assert that I am a confidence man?"

"I don't know. You may be, for all I know to the contrary. Your story does not satisfy me."

"I don't know that I have told you any story, or sought to satisfy you in any manner," returned John, coldly. "I don't even know who you are."

"Very well; you'll learn at the next station," was Percy's answer, as he rose up. "If you want to go to Chicago, you'll have to pay your fare or walk. I'm deputy-assistant superintendent of this road, and you'll be put off at the next station."

So saying, he strode on to the baggage-car, where he found Conductor Jones sorting over his tickets, and said to him:

"Jones, you'll put that tramp off at the next station. I don't believe his story."

Jones looked up amazedly.

"Put him off, Mr. Percy? Why, he saved all our lives."

"Saved our fiddlesticks. I believe he broke the rail himself, on purpose to get a free ride from us. You'll put him off at the next station. I'm deputy-assistant superintendent of this road and I insist on your doing it, or I'll know the reason why, as soon as I get home."

The conductor turned pale at the threat. He knew that young Percy was the only son of the president of the road, put into an office where he had no responsibility, but a good deal of power and a fine salary, simply to familiarize him with the management of railroads.

He knew that the young autocrat, in his pride of despotic will, had turned out more than one old employe of the road already for crossing his whims, and it was with a faltering voice he said:

"Very good, sir, if you insist. But we don't stop till we come to Hotspur Bridge."

"And we don't get there till midnight," the young man said, musingly. "Well, that is a good place to put him off. In the mean time, I'll have him watched. Send Eph Stubbings to me."

Conductor Jones rose unwillingly, but locked his box and went away. As he passed through the smoking-car, he sat down by John a moment.

"See here," he said, in a low tone. "Have you had any muss with young Percy?"

"None, except that he seems to have taken a spite against me," said John. "What has he to do with this train?"

"Not much," returned Jones, dryly; "only this much. His father's president of the road, and what the young fellow says is the law. I've got to put you off at Hotspur Bridge, and we get there at midnight."

"How many miles is that from Chicago?" asked John, not exhibiting very much emotion at the news.

"Two hundred and sixty-seven, on the time-table."

"Well, then, I shall have gained three hundred miles on my road, anyhow," returned the young carpenter, "thanks to your kindness, Mr. Jones."

"That's neither here nor there. But I've made up my mind to one thing. This mean young skunk sha'n't beat me on this business. I promised you a free ride to Chicago, and you're going to get it. Look here."

He took from his pocket a card, and wrote on it some words, and gave it to John.

"When you're put off at the bridge," he said, "you wait till Lathers's train comes along, and get aboard. Lathers is a friend of mine, and he'll put you through as if it were myself. Got any money?"

"Yes," said John, with his contented smile. "I've got a five-dollar bill left, with two more dollars in silver."

"Well, look here," said Jones, still lower. "You just come to this address when you get to Chicago, and my old woman will take care of you. Hold on to every cent you've got, and take

all you can get, if the folks try a collection for you."

"A collection," echoed John. "I don't want any collection, Mr. Jones. I'm not a beggar."

Jones was about to answer, when he saw the face of Percy peering through the glass in the door of the smoker, and in a moment he was up and away on his trip through the cars, pretending to be exceedingly busy, but not deceiving the young man, who called after him:

"Haven't you found Eph yet?"

"In a moment," returned the conductor, as he flitted through the rear door, and very soon after a dark, saturnine brakeman came forward and went into the baggage-car with Percy somewhat to the surprise of John, who could not understand what was the matter till he saw the same brakeman come back and take a seat inside the car, in such a position that he could watch Ray closely, from whom he never removed his eyes.

Pretty soon after that a green-looking man, in the rough dress of a countryman, came into the smoker from the baggage-car, and sat down close to John, to whom he said:

"Ever play keerds, pard?"

"Sometimes," responded John, "when I'm home, but never with strangers of your kind, my friend."

"What d'ye mean?" asked the countryman, looking fierce.

"Simply that your hands are too soft for your dress," said John, quietly. "I've seen your kind before. You're a sharper."

Hardly were the words out when the green-looking countryman, with a fierce oath, let drive a blow at the young carpenter, who only evaded it by a quick motion and then jumped up and grappled his foe.

"What's the matter with you?" cried the young man, angrily, "Do you want me to strangle you?"

For he felt that the sharper was like a child in his powerful grasp, John being a strong-built young fellow, and not unused to physical contests as could be told from the way in which he took hold of his foe.

The sharper choked and gurgled, but began to feel his pockets for a weapon, when Eph Stubbings, the brakeman, rushed forward and dragged him back, saying to John:

"You set down. We don't want no musses on this train, or you'll be put off."

The sharper immediately collapsed, with a suddenness that was suspicious, and John retorted:

"I'm sure I didn't want any trouble with him. You saw him strike me, or strike at me, first."

"That don't make no difference," said the brakeman, with a scowl. "I don't want no back talk with you. I've got my orders to watch you and your pal here."

"My pal!" echoed John. "Do you mean to say you think that fellow is any friend of mine?"

Eph Stubbings grinned sardonically.

"Why, of course he is. That's Slim Jim, the three-card monte man, and you're his pardner."

He spoke so loudly that all in the car could hear him, and Slim Jim uttered a sneering laugh as he observed:

"It's all right, John. Me and you is old friends, ain't we? Let 'em put us off, if they wanter. We don't keer."

John, in the face of these declarations, lost his temper, just at the moment that Stephen Percy made his appearance in the smoker, with such suspicious suddenness that Ray saw at once that it was part of the plot to discredit him.

He turned on Eph Stubbings fiercely:

"I never saw you before, nor this man either. You've been getting up a plot between you against me; why or wherefore I can't tell. You want to put me off this train? Very well, the quicker the better. I've saved all your lives this day, and you repay me with insult. I know who's at the bottom of all this, well enough. Out of my way."

He strode down the center aisle to where Percy was standing, but Eph Stubbings got in his path.

"Here, none of that," said the brakeman, in his sullen way. "I'm doin' the fightin' fur this road to-day."

"You are, are you?" cried John, and with that he let drive a single blow at the brakeman, who was not expecting it, under which he dropped like a log, when the young carpenter strode over his senseless body to Percy, who had turned as white as a sheet, and was evidently frightened.

"It is you," said John, in a voice trembling with anger, "it is you who have set up all this trouble for me, and I know why as well as you do. You want to get me off this train, and you shall have your way. I scorn to accept a favor from a dastard like you. Look here!"

As he spoke, he pulled the bell-cord to stop the train, went back to where Eph Stubbings was lying, slowly coming back to his senses, and picked up his stick and bundle from the seat where it had been lying, as the long scream of the whistle to close the brakes sounded through the train.

Eph heard it, and the instinct of old habit made him scramble up and run to his post as

the train rumbled to a gradual standstill, and Conductor Jones came running up from a rear car, crying excitedly:

"Who pulled that bell-cord?"

"I did," cried back John. "Your friend, Mr. Percy, wants to put me off this train, and I'll not give him the pleasure. I'm going off for my own pleasure."

As he spoke, the train stopped in the midst of a desolate expanse of open prairie, when John walked up to Percy, and said, in a low, distinct voice:

"The next time we meet, take care of yourself. I'll pass you yet, for here in America, I've as good a chance as you. Good-by."

Then he went to the door and opened it, passing out of the train into which he had been so glad to enter, just as the last rays of the setting sun fell over the prairie.

As far as he could see, a smooth and green expanse of grass stretched out, without a fence to break the monotony; a few patches of wood scattered here and there, like islands in the sea, and not a house in sight.

Yet here was the place that John Ray got off the train that he had saved, and saw it move slowly off, leaving him alone once more, a poor tramp on the railroad, with night coming on and the consciousness, in his faint feeling of body, that he had eaten nothing since breakfast and was likely to eat nothing for supper.

He felt hard and bitter enough at the way he had been treated, and stood gazing after the train till it vanished in a cloud of dust, when he began to trudge after it once more, but had not gone a dozen steps when he heard a voice behind him, hailing him:

"Hallo, pard. Whar ye gwine? No reason why me and you shouldn't tramp on a bit together."

And John, turning round, beheld a stout, villainous-looking tramp coming after him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAMPS.

JOHN RAY was in no mood to welcome the new-comer, whose appearance was decidedly unprepossessing, to say the least. He was a typical tramp of the brutal kind, dirty and bearded, broad-shouldered and burly, with a thick cudgel in his hand, and not so much as a bundle or a pair of shoes to raise him in the tramp scale.

However, there was no way to avoid his companionship, so John waited till the other came up, and hung his little bundle over his left arm, while he kept his stick ready with his right, for he more than half-suspected the tramp's intentions.

But the new-comer made no hostile movement, keeping on the other line of rails from that which Jasper had been standing on, and observing:

"Well, pard, so they guv ye the G. B."

"I don't know what you mean," said John, shortly, at which the tramp laughed.

"Hol ho! you're a high old tramp, you are! Reckon ye hain't paid yer footin' yet, you hain't."

"No, nor I don't intend to pay any footing to any one," retorted John, in a defiant tone.

"So if you want to get any money out of me, you'd better not try it on."

The tramp laughed again with perfect good-humor as he replied:

"What's blazes is the use of bein' so durned grouty, pard? We're both tramps together, and they've jest bounced you off that train fur tryin' to steal a ride. We hain't no cause ter quar'."

John felt a little ashamed of himself at the other's good humor, and replied:

"Well, say no more about it. Do you know where we are?"

"Know? You bet. I hain't stole rides on this road for ten year without knowin' every rod of it. We're jest ten miles from Slomansville; that's whar we are. How'd you git put off, pard, from that train?"

"I got off myself, because I was not treated properly."

The tramp roared with laughter.

"Well, I swear to gracious! How'd you expect to be treated? I never drinks nothin' better'n champagne myself, I don't. Say, pard, what's your name, anyhow? You do beat all the coves I ever seen for a tramp, you do."

"What's your name?" retorted John. "I don't tell mine to every tramp I meet."

"My name, pard? Oh, well; thought all the boys knowed me. I'm Red Mike Marble, I am. I've been a tramp goin' on fifteen year. Now, who are you, pard?"

"In the first place," said John, who noticed that under cover of seeming jocularity the other was getting nearer him, while the shades of night were falling faster around them every moment; "in the first place, Mr. Red Mike, I'm not your partner, and don't want your company. In the second place, my name's none of your business. In the third place, you keep on the other line of rails, or I'll lay you out."

Red Mike instantly obeyed, saying:

"You're too darned suspicious to live, you are. You ain't a reg'lar tramp, you ain't, and I know it."

"Of course I'm not," retorted John. "I'd

like to know who would be, if he could help himself."

"Well, I would for one," returned Red Mike, tranquilly; "and I reckon you'll wish you were one afore this night's over, young feller."

"What do you mean?" asked John, with a vague sense of uneasiness he could hardly explain to himself.

"You'll find out fast enough," was the unsatisfactory answer, and with that Red Mike increased his pace and strode on ahead into the gathering darkness, while John, not sorry to be left alone, pursued his own way slowly, looking from side to side on the prairie for a light that should indicate a house.

So he walked on for another hour, purposely lagging behind Red Mike, till the form of the latter was hidden in the gloom.

Then he began to be sensible of the fact that tiny twinkling points of light were springing up on the prairie far ahead of him, and realized that he must be approaching a village of some sort, so he tramped on, rather wondering what sort of a place it could be.

After a mile or two of further walking, he found that these points of light came from fires on the open prairie, and saw dark figures moving to and fro, men, women and children, with more than one covered cart or wagon standing in the firelight, and a hum of voices that told of the presence of a large crowd of people.

Then it flashed on him what it was, and what Red Mike had meant when he told him "he'd wish he were a regular tramp before the night was over."

He had come to a tramps' camp, and it was more than likely that his late friend and companion would prepare for him an ugly reception, if not a robbery and murder, for what little money he had on him.

As these thoughts crossed his mind he stopped short, lay down on the track so as to bring objects against the sky-line, and noticed, on the road far ahead, a dark group of men, apparently waiting for him.

Naturally he hesitated, considering what he should do.

To go forward was to be robbed and very possibly killed, while to go back might be equally dangerous.

He remained lying between the rails for several minutes, and had almost resolved to go back, when he heard the faint, distant scream of a locomotive, and the sound recalled him to himself.

He rolled off the track into the prairie and lay still for awhile, listening to the faint, far-off murmur of the train.

He could not distinguish which way it was coming, but knew it could not be very many miles off.

If he could only get on board that train, it would carry him through the tramps' camp in safety; but he knew there was not any chance of that, for he was several miles—how many he knew not—from the next station, whatever it might be.

Red Mike had told him that he was ten miles from Slomansville; but Red Mike had probably been lying to him. The tramps' camp was not likely to be pitched near any town, and Jasper felt sure he must be in some comparatively desolate stretch of the State of Illinois, though he could not tell where.

Then, as he listened to the coming train, and lay down on the grass, he began to look round him against the sky-line to see if any tramps were near him, or along the track.

He still saw the dark, distant group there, moving to and fro on the rails, and heard the buzz of voices quite plainly, from which he concluded he must be nearer to them than he thought he had been.

And then, as he watched them, he became sensible of the fact that besides the group of men on the track, there was *something else there*.

A log of wood was lying on the rails, and the tramps were fastening it there.

Not content with the ordinary dangers of travel, they were going to try to throw the train from the track in hopes to profit by robbery of the maimed and crippled passengers.

For one moment John's heart stood still before the diabolical scheme; the next it flashed through his mind that if the train was to be saved from this new peril he had but a short time to do it in, and he must run back if he hoped to do anything at all.

Up he jumped at once and began to run back on the railway. He remembered only one thing, that he had noticed a track-walker's house about a mile back, and he trusted to finding some one there.

He could still hear the faint, distant rumble of the train, with an occasional scream, but saw nothing in the darkness, which comforted him greatly, for he knew the road was straight for a long way past the track house, after which it gave a curve off to the south.

He trotted steadily on his way, knowing that he had no time to lose, but that if he hoped to save that train he must get to the track-house. For himself, he had nothing to use to stop it, and if there were no one in the track-house he would be helpless as ever.

Nevertheless, he ran on, in the vague hope

that something might turn up to help him in his efforts, and presently he heard the sharp whistle of the train, much nearer, and could distinguish the beats of the steam in the engine.

"My God!" he groaned to himself. "I can't stop them in the dark! What shall I do?"

Still he ran on, and all of a sudden saw a bright speck of light in the distance.

It was the headlight of the locomotive, not three miles off, coming round the curve of the road, and the glare shone full on the little white track-house, in sight at last, if no: too late.

John ran, panting, on toward the track-house, and just as he had nearly reached it, saw that some one was in the house, for a red lantern was swinging about at the door.

"Halloo!" he yelled, as he ran. "Halloo! Stop that train!"

He saw that there was a man who was carrying the lantern, and within a few minutes more he had run up, almost out of breath, and was brokenly telling his story of what he had seen ahead, to which the trackman listened in silence.

When John had ended his story, he said earnestly:

"Stop the train, for Heaven's sake! I tell you they'll throw it from the track if you don't."

The trackman looked at him in a doubtful sort of way, saying:

"How'm I to know this ain't all a beat to steal a ride? If I stop the train on a false alarm I lose my place for it."

"Let me stop it then," cried John, earnestly. "See! it will be too late in another minute. My God, man! I tell you they're waiting for it."

The trackman looked down the road at the approaching engine; then off at the twinkling of lights of the distant fires of the tramps' camp. In another minute it would be too late to stop the train, so he hastily said:

"Take a torpedo and run to meet it. I'll show a red light, and if this is a beat, you'll pay for it."

As he spoke he handed John a little white package, an! the young man ran to meet the glaring headlight. It was the second time that day he had tried to save others, and he could not help thinking as he ran, that he was not likely to gain much thanks, judging from the suspicious way in which the trackman had treated him already.

On came the glaring light, and he heard the loud scream of the engine, showing that the engineer saw him and was warning him off.

Less than a hundred feet divided them when he placed the white package on the rail and ran to one side.

A moment later came a loud report as the torpedo exploded, and the engineer blew the whistle for down brakes.

CHAPTER V.

SAVED AGAIN.

THE train was going so fast that it rushed by John like a whirlwind, passed the white track-house, and did not stop till near a quarter of a mile beyond, when the young man ran after it, and found the conductor at the rear, talking to the trackman and waiting for him.

All was quiet round them, but people were looking out of the car windows, and the conductor asked him sternly:

"Now, then, what does this mean? Why did you stop this train?"

"Because there's a log lashed on the track less than a mile ahead," said John, boldly; "and a crowd of tramps waiting to wreck the train. If you doubt it, come on with me, and let the train follow slowly."

"And how did you know this?" asked the conductor, suspiciously. "Who are you, anyway, and what are you doing on the track?"

"I'm walking to Chicago," returned the young man. "I saved one train to-day, already, from a broken rail, and got no thanks for it, so I suppose I shall get about the same here."

The conductor, a keen-looking fellow, with a handsome face, interrupted:

"You saved a train? Where?"

"Between New Canterbury and Paradise station," said John, shortly.

The conductor looked surprised.

"What? Was that you? Who was the conductor?"

"Abner Jones," returned John, still more shortly, for he felt nettled at the suspicious way in which every one seemed to be treating him.

To his surprise the conductor held out his hand and began to pull him toward the train, saying:

"I've heard of you already. Your name's John Ray, isn't it?"

"Yes," returned John, a little bewildered. "But how did you know?"

The conductor made him no answer till they had gone half the length of the train, when he said:

"Don't speak loud. My name's Lathers, and Jones telegraphed me back from Hotspur Bridge to Switcherville, to look out for you. But I never expected to find you out here. I'll take you through on the quiet. Your name isn't John Ray, you know. Call it Smith."

It won't do to let Percy know we've beat him. Now about the tramps—it's a stall, isn't it? There are none here, are there? You stopped the train all right and I don't bear malice, but—

"But you think I've deceived you," was the bitter reply of John. "Oh, if I only had money to pay my fare through, I'd have easier times. It seems to me as if you railroad men think every one a thief who hasn't a regular ticket. I almost wish I'd let you go on. No, it's not a stall. I saw the log myself."

Conductor Lathers nodded.

"All right. I'll go ahead on foot, but I never heard of tramps doing such a thing before. Where are they? I don't see any."

John looked ahead, and found that most of the twinkling fires had vanished, especially those near the track, while those at a distance seemed to have been allowed to burn down to embers.

"There they are," he said. "How many I don't know, but I'm sure they're hiding. A little while ago the fires were all over the prairie."

The conductor turned round on the track and swung his lantern, when they heard the slow puff and snort of the engine.

"Come on, young fellow," said Lathers, walking forward, with one hand in a side-pocket. "We'll soon see who's on the track. Got any firearms?"

"No," returned John: "but that needn't worry you. This club will settle any man as well as a pistol."

Lathers nodded again.

"You're grit," he observed, walking on in the same brisk fashion, the train rumbling slowly after them at a few hundred feet distance, stopping frequently as they came nearer and nearer to the place where John had seen the log on the track.

At last he came to the very place; but the log was gone; and Lathers said, dryly:

"Well, where's your throw-off, young man? This looks more and more like a stall on your part."

John began to feel the cold sweat run down his back, as he said:

"It was here. I'll swear to it—on this very rail. Ha! Look!"

The locomotive had come so near that the glare of the head-light shone on the rails and into the ditch on each side of the track.

There in the ditch, where they had been hastily dropped, lay two huge logs, evidently sleepers, that had been torn up from the track at some other place, and Lathers exclaimed:

"By Heavens! you told the truth. Look out! Some of the devils may be 'round."

As if to show him he was right, at that very moment a number of dark forms rose up on the prairie, and a volley of stones, bolts, blocks of wood and other missiles came hurtling at them, one of which struck the conductor full on the side of the head and felled him like a slaughtered ox, when a rush of men took place at John, who had only time to whirl up his club when Red Mike shouted out:

"Give it to the cussed scab! He's squealed on us! Knock the daylights out of him. Tar his baslet from his karkidge, dod-rot him for a scab!"

In another moment the young man was fighting desperately against the assaults of at least twenty men, armed with clubs and railroad spikes, who would have made him repent his temerity, when the rapid reports of a revolver from the engine cab caused a general stampede, and out jumped the engineer, blazing away his last shots, and yelling out:

"Stop my train, would yer? Take that, ye darned galoots."

And the sound of the pistol caused an immediate exodus from the train of excited gentlemen with revolvers, who began to blaze away into the prairie on all sides, under the impression that a troop of highwaymen had attacked the train and that they were called on to be heroic and shoot everybody on sight.

The engineer heard them and laughed.

"You wouldn't be so darned quick if there war any one to shoot back," he growled rather contemptuously; then came forward to the conductor and lifted him up, while he said to John.

"You're grit, anyway. Hurt any?"

"A little; not much," answered John, as he wiped the blood from a cut on his forehead. "Do you think they'll try any more to-night?"

"Not them," growled the engineer. "They don't know nothen, them tramps. It's like tryin' to git up steam on burnin' straw. It don't last. It's all a puff, and then it's out again. They ain't got no grit. It takes a man to stop a train and go through it, like Jesse James; and these galoots is so full of him that they thinks every tramp they see's one of the gang. Reckon they'd find out the differ, ef Jesse war here."

Thus grumbling, he brought back the stunned conductor, and got him into the baggage-car, where he slowly revived, when the train proceeded on its way to Slomansville, where it arrived an hour and a half behind time, by which

period Conductor Lathers had recovered his senses and was able to attend to his duties pretty well.

He had been struck with a block of wood under the ear, but, beyond the first stunning effect of the blow, had received no serious injury.

The news spread at Slomansville that the tramps had formed a camp on the prairie, and had gone so far as to try and throw a train off the track, created great excitement in the place, for Slomansville had had trouble with tramps before, and the citizens began to organize a posse for the sheriff that very evening.

John Ray found himself an object of interest to every one in town, as the man who had saved two trains in one day; and a collection would have been started for him in the station had he not refused to accept anything but a ride to Chicago.

"I didn't even prevent the train going off the track," he said, deprecatingly, "for the tramps had thought better of it and removed the obstacle before we came there."

"Yes," returned Lathers, "and I was fool enough to think you were putting up a job to steal a ride, till the moment those fellows plugged me. They must have seen the train stop, and suspected that they were found out, when they saw us coming so slowly. You saved the train, and you sha'n't suffer for it as long as I'm the conductor. They knew it was you stopped their little game, or they wouldn't have been so fierce to lay you out; so come aboard, young fellow."

And aboard John went, though not before he had been supplied with the food that he had needed so long, for Slomansville was a supper station and the train hands boarded there.

Then, as they whirled away over the prairie toward the great West, the young adventurer found himself at last installed in comfort, in something he had never traveled in before, the forward compartment of a sleeping-car, where he could rest his wearied limbs and repose in peace, while being whirled on his way at the rate of thirty miles an hour. To be sure it was not a luxurious car, such as the one in which he had seen the young lady, about whom he had been dreaming ever since.

It was only an "emigrant sleeping-car," with bare bunks, of which most were occupied by German families going West, while the forward one was kept for the accommodation of such train hands as could be permitted to sleep by relays, a favor few availed themselves of; but which served as a lounging and story-telling place, in the long intervals between stations.

Here John stretched himself out, feeling tired and sleepy, and found himself listening to the conversation that went on below him in a dull buzz till it lulled him to perfect slumber, and he knew no more till he woke to hear the brakeman calling out:

"Rouse up, in there! Chicago in half an hour more."

Then John rose up, feeling in his heart a strange mingling of sensations.

"I have got there at last," he thought, "and I have what I never thought I should have, a good chance to go to work at once. But on my journey I have made an enemy in the son of the president of this road. Have I made any friends? I don't know. She was very kind to me; but she'll forget all about me, though I believe I'll never forget her."

No one needs to be told who *She* was, or to wonder why John was thinking of her, as he neared the city where his future fortunes were to lie.

He had only seen Edith Wallis once; he knew she was an heiress, while he was a poor tramp, a mechanic out of work; yet this audacious young man was actually thinking of the millionaire's daughter, for all the world as if she had been a woman no better than himself.

He kept on thinking of her as the train whirled along toward Chicago, and her face was in his mind as he stepped out of the car, bundle in hand, and found himself alone in the streets of the strange city he had never seen before.

John Ray had been bred up in the country, in one of the wilder parts of Pennsylvania, where he had gained an education at a district school which he had valued as no man values it who has not brains to start with in the first place.

A farmer's son, one of a large family, he had known from the first that he had to work for his living, and had been used to doing it. But he had noticed from his childhood, that those who stayed at home on the farms and were contented with merely making a living, grew stiff and stupid as they grew older, while a few in the community, who were restless and dissatisfied with their life, went away as soon as they were old enough, and were heard of in after years as having prospered in other parts of the Union.

And John, being a boy who did a good deal of thinking, had made up his mind that he would go away and make his fortune as soon as he grew old enough. Then, as he noticed closer, he found out another thing: that *all* who went away did *not* prosper. More than one came back, broken down, to sink into loafers round

the country store, too lazy to work and generally drunkards.

So that John began to inquire of himself why some men failed in life and others succeeded; and while he was thinking it over he attended winter school, which happened to be taught that winter by a young Irishman who had recently come into that neighborhood with an amount of learning that the simple folk of Pike county looked on as amazing. Therefore, on one occasion, he had asked this schoolmaster, whom he revered, what was the reason that some men failed in life and others succeeded, when he received the following answer, which he never forgot:

"In the Old World," said his teacher, "a man may fail through no fault of his own. They have classes there. In America it is different. One man is as good as another. If a man fails in life here, it is generally owing to ignorance; and that is his own fault, while we have free schools. Look up the history of your friends that succeed and the others that fail, and you'll find the reason of success in two words—Perseverance and Knowledge. Keep your eyes and ears open. Learn all you can, and then make up your mind to aim high. There is nothing a man cannot do in this country if he tries hard enough."

And John had never forgotten those words, nor the man that had uttered them, though he had lost sight of him after that one winter's term. He had stuck to his books, in school and out; learned the trade of a carpenter, with a book lying on the bench as he worked; and at twenty-three had finally started out in the world, as we have seen him, one of the sort of tramps that only America produces in perfection, the men who end as millionaires.

He had worked his way through a country college and had taken a degree when he had only two dollars left in the world: he had learned wood-carving from observation; was a fair surveyor, with a smattering of legal knowledge, picked up from a lawyer who had lent him books to read; and now he entered the strange city of Chicago with seven dollars and twenty-five cents for all his worldly wealth in his pocket, but with his head high in the air as he said to himself:

"One man is as good as another in America. A man can do anything, if he only tries hard enough."

Yet all he had to provide for his future was a little card on which was printed:

"MR. SEPTIMUS WALLIS,"

and on the back of which was scribbled in pencil: "Put on the bearer where you can, S. P.," with the name, "Mr. Welby," under the senator's name on the other side.

John had a general idea that the car factory was somewhere in the city; and, as he felt hungry, he began to look round for some place to get breakfast, when he had fairly got out of the depot. He was rather bewildered at the bustle of the streets, for he was unused to very large cities, but he suddenly recollects that his friend Abner Jones had given him a card and told him to call at that address as soon as he got to Chicago.

He hunted up the card and was directed to a street near the depot, where he soon found the conductor's residence, and was greeted by Abner Jones himself, who came to the door, rubbing his eyes and saying:

"Well, well, I thought somehow that you wouldn't be long after our train. How did Lathers treat you? I needn't ask; for he's a friend, he is. Come right in. I'm glad to see you; and we'll go to the factory after breakfast. So you beat Percy, after all. I'm glad of it. Here, Annie, here's John Ray, I told you of. Come to breakfast."

CHAPTER VI.

BEGINNING LIFE.

It seemed to John, coming as he did to a strange city, as if Abner Jones had dropped on him from heaven like an angel, and the reception he met with from Mrs. Jones, a little, apple-faced woman with the merriest of laughs, completed his thankfulness.

Mrs. Jones insisted that he should board with her until he got a better place, and at first would not hear of anything but an unlimited visit as a guest.

"And I'd like to know who has a better right to stay here?" she asked him, when he objected. "If you hadn't stopped Abner's train, where would Abner have been this morning, I'd like to know? Killed or crippled, and me a widow or worse. No, no, Mr. Ray. We poor folks must stick to one another; for it's certain the rich won't help us. Now, then, Abner, if you're going to see Mr. Ray to the factory, it's time you were off, for Mr. Welby goes off to Omaha at noon, to join the Congress people."

"Ay, ay," returned Abner, who, at home and off duty, was disposed to be lazy, while on the road he was a model of restless energy. "Don't hurry a fellow, Annie. I take out his train."

"What train's that?" asked John.

"The big excursion. Didn't you know we were on it, yesterday? A lot of big-bugs from

Congress, going to Frisco with the officers of the road and old Wallis. There's some bill or other coming on to give the road a heap of money, and the Congress fellows are going to have a nice time, dead-heading it all the way to the Pacific Slope."

"But why didn't you go on last night?"

"Because some of them wanted to see the city, and as for me, I'd rather pass one quiet night at home here, if it's only three hours, than to go on with those high and mighty fellows, who think they are better than their neighbors. But they are going on again at noon, and I've got to take them, I suppose. They're going over the factory this morning, so, if you get on in time, you may have a chance to see them again."

John hesitated.

"Hadn't I better wait till they're gone?"

"Why?" asked Jones, surprised.

"Because it might look as if I was trying to get in under favor," said John, in a low tone, "and I don't want any but an even chance. One man is as good as another, you know, and I don't want to force myself in where I'm not wanted."

John stared, and his wife burst out:

"Well, I never! I should think you'd jump at this chance, after you've earned it."

"But that was an accident," returned the young man, in the same way. "I just happened to save the train. Any man might have done the same."

"And any man might *not* have done it," returned Jones, energetically. "Come, come, young fellow, Annie don't understand what you mean; but I do, and I say you're too scrupulous. If you want to get on in the world you must take every chance you get; for chances don't drop into a man's mouth every day. You come with me, and we'll go and see Welby."

He took John off; for it was still early, before regular working hours, and they rode in the horse-cars to the outskirts of the city, where they found the factory just beginning work, a great deal of bustle pervading the place; while a stout man, with a long gray beard, and imperious manner, was bustling about, ordering people round.

"That's Seth Welby," said Jones. "He's the manager; Down-East Yankee, like all the rest here. Come along. Don't be scared if he speaks sharp. He don't mean anything by it."

He looked as if he did, though, when they came up, for he scowled at Jones and said, crossly:

"Well, what do you want? Don't you see I'm as busy as I can be? No time to talk before visiting hours."

"Here's a young man—" began Jones, when Mr. Welby interrupted:

"I thought so. Well, there's no vacancy. I can't attend to you now. Come again after twelve. I'm busy till then."

And he was turning away as if they had not existed for him, when John Ray, who was always emboldened by opposition, while kindness abashed him, stepped forward in Mr. Welby's way, saying:

"I beg your pardon, but mine's a different case. Just look at that card, and you'll see it is. I came on business, and one man is as good as another at that."

His firm tone, handsome face, and especially the language he used, took the superintendent aback, for he had the card in his hand before he knew what he was about, and as soon as his eye fell on the name he said hastily:

"Oh, that's different! Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm a carpenter and wood-carver, and want work," returned John. "Put me on where you like, and if I don't give satisfaction you needn't pay me."

Seth Welby turned the card over and over in his hand, while he scanned the young man's figure, saying:

"Are you used to running planers or buzz-saws?"

"I've done it," returned John, still in the fewest possible words, "but I don't want to do it, if I can get carving to do."

The superintendent screwed up his lips.

"Carving, indeed! Hem! young man, I'm not sure you *could* do our carving. Got any specimens to show?"

"No, sir," returned John, quietly. "I had one, but Miss Wallis wanted it, so I gave it to her on the journey here."

Welby looked at him dryly.

"The young lady will be here to-day with the visitors. I'll ask her whether you have told the truth. In the mean time, I'll put you on the planing-machines."

He turned and called out:

"Hallo, there! Send George Higgins here!"

Then he went about his business, ordering and scolding all round, till a thin man with a sharp face came up, to whom he said, indicating John:

"Put this man on as an extra hand, and see what he can do. Look sharp, for the visitors will be here in half an hour, and I want things to look lively."

Then he hustled away, and Abner Jones shook John Ray's hand and left the shop, with a parting injunction "not to forget that the little house

in Blankman street was his home till he could get a better one."

And John followed his conductor to the first of a row of steam planing-machines, where, in five minutes after, he was busy running black walnut planks through the rollers as if he had been at it all his life, though as a matter of fact he had never run a planer but a week before.

The workman's instinct to make a good job of everything he undertakes, kept him with every faculty absorbed in the task of running the wood through and making the smoothest possible planks, though he was rather disappointed at not being allowed to carve; but he soon forgot all his little soreness in watching the beautiful grain of the different planks, and had been at it for nearly an hour, oblivious of his surroundings, when he heard a sweet voice behind him exclaim:

"Why, papa, if it isn't Mr. Ray."

Then he found that a group of people were staring at him, old Senator Wallis in the midst of it, with Billings, the long-bearded Congressman, beaming over his glasses, while young Percy in the background, was surveying him with a smile that contrasted forcibly with his last expression as John remembered it.

But he hardly noticed any of these things; for he saw the beautiful face of Edith Wallis near by, and forgot everything else in his intoxicating joy. It flushed up in his face and he stood up and looked her in the eye, as he pulled off his hat and bowed, so like a gentleman that the members of the group looked at each other, surprised to see such a man at such work.

The saws and planers were whirring and buzzing all round them, so as to make conversation difficult, yet he had heard her voice plainly, and he noted that she colored slightly and bowed in return to his salute, while Percy's smile changed to a sneering scowl, as the eyes of both young men met.

Then the group moved away, and the young carpenter saw them go toward the office, the superintendent walking ahead to pilot the way, and John went back to his work, his heart beating like a trip-hammer at the remembrance of her face, while he pushed the planks into the planer as skillfully as ever.

Presently he felt a touch on his shoulder and saw a boy at his side, who wore the uniform of the company. The boy yelled into his ear, over the noise of the machines:

"What's your name?"

"John Ray," said the young carpenter, at which the boy nodded, and yelled again:

"You're wanted—in the office!"

Then he went off, and John shook the chips and shavings from his clothing and went toward the office, which he found full of people, with several ladies in the party, among whom Edith Wallis was conspicuous, while everybody was staring at him.

His old enemy, Stephen Percy, looked as if he had been doing something in which he triumphed, while Senator Wallis had a hard, stern look on his face that had grown habitual to it since he had been a millionaire, and Seth Welby had his usual cross-grained expression.

There was a dead silence as the young man entered the room, and then Senator Wallis said, in his harsh, grating voice:

"I'm told, young man, that they had some trouble with you on the train yesterday, and that you had to be put off. Is that true?"

"No," returned John, drawing himself up; "it is not true. I stopped the train myself and got off."

"But, before you got off, you were engaged in a fight with a notorious card-sharper called Slim Jim," interrupted Percy, in smooth tones. "Now don't make it worse by denying it, young man, because I was there and saw you grappling with him."

Jasper wheeled round on him, and his anger blazed up again.

"Yes, you saw me choke him, after he had been set on me. That's true. And you saw me stop the train and get off, because I wouldn't ride with your party on sufferance. And what of it all?"

"Simply this," said the old senator. "I withdraw my recommendation unless you apologize to Mr. Percy for your insolence to him yesterday. He tells me that you used insulting language to him. I don't want any bullies in my employment, and I won't have them."

John looked at him and saw the hard, pitiless lines of the millionaire face, that never relents, so he answered:

"If I had done any wrong to Mr. Percy, I should be the first to apologize. But as I am not conscious of any wrong, I decline to do any such thing; for I consider that in this country one man is as good as another."

Percy smiled in his usual sneering way, and murmured loud enough to be heard:

"I told you so, sir. The fellow's a regular communist. I've no doubt he considers that he's as good as you are."

The senator drew his brows a little closer, and said in his most grating way:

"Mr. Welby, you'll discharge this young man at once. Young man, leave this office, and be quick about it."

John drew himself up and put on his hat, looking the old man in the face as he answered:

"I'll go, sir; but I warn you that the time will come when you'll see that you have acted unjustly toward me. Good-day."

Then he took off his hat to Edith Wallis, and said, before any one could stop him:

"Good-by, madam. You are the only person that has treated me as a human being, and I shall never forget it. Good-by, and God bless you."

The office was quite silent, and no one said a word as he walked out, never looking back, till Percy uttered a low sneering laugh, and said:

"What heroics these fellows can put on, after all, senator. One would think he was a prince in disguise, instead of a mere common carpenter."

John heard him as he opened the door to go out, and was sorely tempted to turn back, but something restrained him, and it was lucky it did: for as he closed the door again he heard the sweet tones of Edith Wallis, answering:

"You forget, sir, that my father was once a carpenter."

Then John heard no more as he went out through the shop into the streets, but the words kept ringing in his ears:

"My father was once a carpenter."

They seemed to put new life into him as he strode along the streets, saying to himself:

"One man's as good as another. If her father was a carpenter, I can rise as high as her father, and I will."

He ceased to reflect that he was alone in a strange city, a carpenter without tools or a place; he only remembered the words uttered by the woman he adored.

"My father was once a carpenter."

He did not look back at the factory he had just left behind him, but strode along the streets toward the only house he knew, excitedly murmuring to himself as he went, till he felt some one tugging at the sleeve of his coat, and saw the same boy he had seen before who panted out:

"Golly, mister, are you trainin' fur a go-as-you-please match? Here's a letter fur ye, from a lady. No answer."

Then he darted away, leaving John staring at a letter in his hand addressed:

"MR. JOHN RAY."

He trembled as he opened it, suspecting the sender.

CHAPTER VII.

MEETING A FRIEND.

JOHN RAY trembled all over as he opened the letter. He knew well enough from whom it came. Who could send it but one? The boy had worn the company's uniform, and had said that a lady had sent it. What lady but one would write to John? She who had already dared to be kind to him, who had returned his salute before a crowd of haughty rich people, and who had dared to say before them all:

"My father was once a carpenter."

He opened the letter and kissed the signature: for there it lay before him—"EDITH WALLIS."

But his face flushed as he saw and felt something else in the letter between the two sheets—a bank-bill.

She was sending money to him, treating him like a beggar!

Was she?

For a moment he crushed the note in his hand, and ground his teeth, muttering:

"What? Is she, too, like the rest? Does she think that a poor man wants nothing but money? I'll not take it! I'll—"

In his haughty and rather unreasonable mood of angry independence he felt as if he would tear up the note and throw it away, but better thoughts prevailed.

"No," he said, "I'll read it over. I don't think a woman with a face like hers could be so ignorant as that. She means something I don't understand."

Then he read the note, which contained only these words:

"DEAR MR. RAY:—

"My father insists on my paying you for your beautiful carving, and I hope you will accept the little trifle I inclose, if not as payment, then as a loan till hap'ier times." EDITH WALLIS."

"P. S. Don't think too hardly of my father. He is influenced by others. I shall never forget I owe you my life."

Then he turned to the bill inclosed and found to his amazement that the generous girl had put a fifty-dollar note in the letter.

The delicate way in which the offer was made brought the tears to his eyes as he folded up letter and money together, and put them in his breast-pocket.

"If I touch that money," he thought, "it will only be in my sorest need; but if ever I see her again, and am able to give it back to her, how proud I shall be."

He walked along more quietly now, thinking what he should do, for his sudden dismissal from a job on which he had hardly entered left him adrift on the world.

He was one of those bright, confident young fellows, however, not easily discouraged, and he

knew how to go to work, having been in strange places before. He left the main streets of the city, and betook himself to the outskirts of Chicago, where he had noticed, as he came into the city by rail, that numbers of small wooden buildings were going up, for it was not very many years after the fire.

He went systematically from house to house, asking for work, refused often, but never discouraged, till he came to a large, handsome house, of which the outside was finished, while the noise of tools inside told him that finer work was being done. Into this he walked just as a gentleman in black was coming out.

The gentleman in black stopped and looked at him closely, while John returned the gaze with interest; for it seemed to him he knew the face.

The gentleman in black was tall and stout, with a fat face and a large head. He had little side-whiskers and long hair, while his heavy jaw gave his face a leonine aspect, and his voice was deep as that of a tragic actor, as he said:

"I've seen ye somewhere. What's your name, me friend?"

There was quite a strong brogue in his speech, though his words were those of a person of education, and the way he was dressed showed that he was well to do in the world.

"My name is Ray," returned John, "and I've seen you somewhere; but where I could not say. Your face is familiar, yet you must be altered somewhat, I think."

The big man smiled and nodded.

"Ay, ay, I mind it now. Ray, Ray. Yes; ye're the country boy that once put a question to me that's staggered a good many men. Your name's John, isn't it?"

"Yes," said our carpenter, mystified; "but where and how—I don't recollect—"

"Ye don't, don't ye? Well, I'll bring it to your mind by the associative process. Ye asked me once, and you a slip of a boy of twelve, why some men succeeded in life and others failed; and I told ye, in me ignorance, for I was but twenty at the time, that I knew. Bedad, John, I take it back. I've not found out. It depends on a number of circumstances over which we have no control. Now, d'ye know me?"

John grasped his hand joyfully.

"Why, it is Mr. O'Rourke," he cried. "My old master! How glad I am to see you! And where have you been all this time, and what are you doing?"

O'Rourke shook his hand warmly and looked kindly at him as he replied:

"I've been in a good many places, and I'm not sure but I'd be better off if I hadn't. I'm a lawyer now and ye know lawyers are like cats; they know how to find a warm place. And what are ye doing here, John?"

John colored slightly.

"I've come out to seek my fortune and follow your advice, Mr. O'Rourke. I'm looking for carpenter work to do."

"Are ye now? That's strange. And d'ye know what I was going out for?"

"No, sir."

"To look for another carpenter, bedad. Ye see, that was something we neither of us looked for, and had no agency in procuring or preventing. That answers the definition of luck. John, me boy, ye shall have all the work ye want. This is my house, and I want a dale of work done for myself and ever so many clients. Come in."

He took him into the unfinished house, and showed him everything that had been done and wanted doing. There were two men already at work; but it seemed that O'Rourke wanted things hurried up, so that he might get into the house soon.

"And what with my wife quarreling with the landlady, and the beefsteaks coming from Texas," he told John, "boarding is a snare and a delusion; and that thief of a plumber hasn't finished the bath-room as he said he would, and the mantles are all in the rough. There's plenty of work for ye, John; and if ye only knew how to carve wood, I'd give ye a job, bedad, would gladden the cockles of your heart, so it would."

John laughed.

"Well, now, do you know, Mr. O'Rourke, I've learned carving in wood since I saw you last. What do you want carved?"

O'Rourke clapped him on the back.

"Bedad, boy, your fortune's made! Don't ye know every one's crazy for the carved work what they call aesthetic stuff, bad luck to 'em! It's little I care for it myself; but one's got to be in the fashion, sc here goes. Come with me!"

He took him to a large, handsome parlor, almost finished, except that the mantle-piece, which was made of oak, had been left in rough wood, with great projecting bosses here and there.

"D'ye think ye could carve that?" asked the lawyer, with a twinkle of his eye. "Here's the design, ye know, on paper, with all sorts of leaves, and fruits, and birds, and the devil knows what on it. Can ye do it?"

He showed John a large and elaborate drawing, properly shaded, and added:

"The architect drew that, and devil a man have I been able to find in Chicago could follow it, so I'll have to send East for a workman, if you can't do it."

"I think I can," said John, slowly. "It is a pretty intricate design; but, as I see the first rough work has been done, I'll attempt it. What wages do you pay?"

"Wages!" echoed O'Rourke. "Me dear boy, I'll think it cheap at five dollars a day, and ten if ye insist on it. Sure, I'm not a Vanderbilt or Sammy Tilden, or I'd do better by ye. But you do that nice, as it ought to be done, and if the city don't hear it, my name's not Matthew O'Rourke. Have ye any tools?"

"Yes," said John. "I brought them along with me, because they don't weigh much, and one can carry them in the pocket. I have them here."

And he took from his pocket a leathern case full of small chisels, gouges and gravers, at which O'Rourke looked approvingly, saying:

"I see ye know your business. Now when can ye go to work?"

John's only reply was to take off his coat, lay out the drawing on the floor, and begin to sketch on one of the bosses of the design that the architect had made, which he did with rapidity and precision.

"I'll have these grapes and leaves laid out rough by to-morrow," he said, in a few moments after. "If you choose to trust me, I'll begin to-day."

O'Rourke nodded.

"Go ahead, me boy! If ye make a good job of it, ye'll be taking in as much as I do, in a year or two. I'll have ye now, but I'll be back to-night."

Then he went away, and John began his first great task of wood-carving since he had worked at it for pleasure.

He had picked it up, partly from looking at carved work done by others, in a visit he had once paid to Philadelphia at the Centennial, partly from poring over blocks of wood and experimenting.

He had the advantage of being a good carpenter to start with, and had not ventured out into the world before he knew what he could do.

The task set before him was a difficult one to him; for it comprehended forms he had never carved before; but the drawing was before him to remind him of what was required, and he began cautiously, his hand at first rather timid and slow, but after a little while, gaining confidence from the fact that he was alone, with no one to criticise him, working more and more rapidly, till he had entirely forgotten himself in his labors, and was gouging away deep in' o the boss of oak, when he heard a voice behind him say:

"Hello, young feller, you're green, seems to me, ain't you?"

John looked round and saw a man in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a wooden pipe, and looking at him with a dry, amused sort of smile.

"Green? What makes you say that?" he asked, puzzled. "Are you a carver?"

"No, I ain't no carver," returned the other, "but I reckon I know what's workin'-hours as well as any man, and I don't work for no boss in dinner-hours."

"Oh, I see," said John, "it's dinner-time. I declare I was so much interested in my work I didn't hear the whistle or bells. Which is it you have here?"

"The pen-factory blows a whistle, and there's a church with a strikin' clock round the corner. Why, I've had my dinner, and so's Bill Everts. We're doin' the parlor doors up-stairs. My name's Large, Steve Large, and I don't knock under to no man on fine work."

John took up his tools again.

"I think I'll go without dinner to-day," he said. "I don't board near here, and I should lose too much time if I went out to get anything. My name's Ray. I suppose we shall work together for some time."

"Yes," returned Large, doubtfully, "if we don't get through afore you do. Say, Ray, you ain't a Western man, are ye?"

"No, I am from Pennsylvania," and then followed a conversation in which John learned much about affairs, in which unions and strikes were leading ideas, all new to him, but in return for Large's confidences he announced his own views so decisively that, when his fellow-workman walked away he looked as if the man from Pennsylvania had given him some new ideas as to the dignity of labor.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOING UP IN THE WORLD.

We must pass rapidly over the next few months of John Ray's life, during which he pursued the same course he had marked out for himself when he left home to seek his fortune. The words of O'Rourke, years before, that "Perseverance and knowledge" were the secrets of success, had never left his mind; though O'Rourke himself now disclaimed being certain of any such thing.

The words of Edith Wallis: "My father was once a carpenter," were even more powerful in their influence over him. They had roused up in the mind of a young man, who had hitherto only thought of the present, an ambition to make a future for himself, and he thought of nothing else, day and night, whether he worked at his carving or dived into O'Rourke's books, hungry for knowledge as ever.

He made a success of the carved mantle-piece, and O'Rourke kept his promise to make it known throughout the city. John found, before he had been many weeks in Chicago, that a man who can do one thing better than any one else is better off than a man who can do many things well. He had all the work he wanted, and the richest people in the city competed with each other to offer him high prices so as to secure the best wood-carver to be found in the West.

And so matters went on till winter arrived, and John Ray found himself with money saved and an assured future before him, as long as he was able to work, in a position where he said to himself:

"It is time I rose to something higher. If Senator Wallis could make a fortune, so can I. How shall I do it? How did he do it?"

It was while his thoughts were taken up with this theme that, one day, going to his work in the gorgeous house of a great Western millionaire, who had made a fortune in grain speculating, and had ordered a quantity of carving from John to be done under his own eye, he saw a handsome sleigh pass up the avenue on which he was, driven by a black coachman, and containing the very man of whom he had been thinking, with a lady beside him.

His heart throbbed violently as he marked the graceful outlines of the figure of Edith Wallis; for he knew it well, though her face was covered by a veil and she was muffled in costly furs.

She did not see him, however, and he marked the sleigh pass on, while he went to the house of Mr. Shaw, dreaming all the way of what he could say to her if he met her.

When he got to the house itself, what was his surprise to find the very equipage which he had noticed standing empty in front of it, the black driver, wrapped in his buffalo overcoat, sitting patiently at his post, with a groom in livery on the sidewalk, stamping to and fro to keep himself warm.

He went up the steps, rung the bell, and was ushered in as usual by the servant, who had learned that John Ray, the best wood-carver at the West, was to be treated with respect, or the servants would "catch it" from their employers.

In fact, John, with people offering him ten and fifteen dollars a day, and glad to get him, John, in fine raiment, and looking more like a gentleman than ever, was a very different man from the tramp who had once been put off the train by Percy's orders, and at every house he went to, was treated as an artist, besides being invited out to parties, though he never attended any.

The servant closed the door and told him:

"Mr. Shaw has visitors, sir. I believe they've come to see your sideboard. They're in the work-room now."

This was a common experience to Ray, for visitors were always coming to the houses where he worked to see what he was doing, and give orders ahead, so that he was used to them.

On this occasion, however, his color came and went, and he felt a degree of confusion that he had never experienced before as he went to his work-room, where his millionaire friend Shaw was standing with two people as he came in, and he heard him say:

"Of course it's the cheapest way in the end, to pay by the day. These artist fellows have no knowledge of the world, or they'd see it—"

Then he stopped suddenly as John came in, and said in his most cordial manner:

"Good-morning, Mr. Ray. My friend, Senator Wallis, has come in to see our sideboard. I'm telling him he can't beat it in this country unless he gets you, and I'm not going to let you go. Senator, Mr. Ray, the gentleman I told you of. Miss Wallis, this is the wonderful wood-carver."

And then John found himself bowing with as much dignity as he could to the man who had turned him out of his factory only a few months before, but who now did not appear to recognize him, for it was in perfectly bland tones that he said:

"I am very happy to make your acquaintance, sir. I've heard a good deal of you lately."

John bowed again, but more coldly, and made no answer.

There was something in the old man's face now as insincere in its bland smoothness as it had been disagreeable when he had last seen it in anger.

Then it wore the hard, pitiless selfishness of the millionaire; the look of a man who keeps a secretary to open his mail every morning and pick out the begging letters; the look of a man whose one idea is to buy cheap and sell dear.

Now it was covered with the mask of courtesy, a smile on the close-shaven lips, stretching out to the mutton-chop whiskers, a wheedling kind of smile, over which the cold gray eyes looked like wells of selfishness, reflecting everything, but keeping the real design hidden in dark depths.

In short, John could see that the old senator wanted something, or he would not have been so polite; and his thoughts gave a jump at once to what it might be.

He hardly dared look at Edith Wallis, though

he noted in one swift glance that she was more beautiful than ever, and that her soft brown eyes had a sad look in them.

Then Shaw observed, rubbing his hands:

"Well, senator, do you think you've got any one in all your factory who could do such a sideboard in oak? Come, own up."

"It's pretty, very pretty," assented Wallis, with a critical glance. "Edith, my dear, what do you think of it?"

"It's the best thing I ever saw," said she, in a low tone, when her father hastily interrupted:

"Oh, dear, no; don't be so sweeping. It is very good, indeed, of course, Shaw, very good; but then you must go to Europe to see first-class work of this sort. It is good for Chicago, very good; but I've a man can beat it at the factory."

"Bet you a thousand you haven't!" the grain speculator retorted. "Come, now, come down, or take water. A thousand that you haven't as good a man."

"Well, not now," admitted the senator, "for he's sick and not expected to live. Come, Shaw, you know what I was telling you I'd do with you, if you'll give up your contract with this gentleman. Let me speak to him openly."

"Oh, I don't mind," returned Shaw. "Say what you want to say. I won't hinder you, but you've got to name high figures, or he won't come."

John looked from one to the other and then at Edith, whose face, now he dared to gaze at it, had a sad expression that puzzled him. She met his eyes one moment, and then dropped her own, coloring slightly as old Wallis began:

"Ahem! Mr. Ray, are you willing to enter into negotiations for permanent work?"

John looked at him keenly.

"That depends on its nature and pay, sir."

"Exactly, of course. You're right to be prudent. I would not have got on in the world if I had not been prudent. Well, the fact is—"

And here he seemed to stick fast.

"What is it, sir?" asked John. "Do you want to engage me permanently as a carver in your factory?"

"Exactly, exactly. You see it's not as if I couldn't do better for myself with a lower-priced man; for our carvings are not like this, and you might not suit at all; but—"

He stopped again.

"But at the same time you think I would, or you wouldn't make the offer," said John, with a faint sneer.

The old gentleman colored slightly, but he was too old a bargainer to lose temper.

"Very well put. But it's not exactly as a carver I want you."

"Indeed? What then?"

"Well, a sort of general superintendent of the carving-room, a designer—a—in short, a man who can tell them what to do."

"Then why don't you take one of the men you have already?" asked Ray, coldly.

"True, true, so I might, but the fact is, between you and me, Mr. Ray, you have—"

He hesitated again, and Ray laughed.

"Something they have not."

"Exactly, or I shouldn't be here. Now, I want to know what figures you will take to come to my factory as carver-in-chief, on a contract for ten years?"

Then he looked at John keenly through his half-shut eyes, and John turned to Mr. Shaw, saying:

"Will you tell Mr. Wallis, what are my terms with you, sir? I can't signed a contract with him without your consent."

Shaw rubbed his hands.

"Certainly, certainly. Wallis, my dear fellow, if you want Ray, you've got to pay for him. He has made a contract with me to finish a book-case and mantle after this piece here, and I'm paying him fifteen dollars a day for his time."

The old millionaire's face remained as hard as marble. It was impossible to tell how the price affected him, for he said nothing; and Shaw went on:

"I shall certainly sue him if he breaks his contract with me, so he'll have to pay me damages. I'd like to oblige you, of course, but, by Jove, you know, I've as much pride as you have in getting up the finest house in Chicago."

Wallis turned to John.

"Will you call on me this evening? I think I can come to your terms. As for Shaw, I can fix him."

He spoke in a slightly contemptuous way of his brother millionaire, and, a little to John's surprise, the other did not in the least resent it, but said:

"All right. I don't want to stand in Ray's light, if he wants to better himself. Go and see him, Ray, whenever he says."

John bowed coldly.

"I'll call on you if you desire, sir; but I don't care to break any contract, even to oblige you."

Wallis nodded and screwed up his face into a virtuous expression.

"Very proper spirit, very proper, Mr. Ray. Say at seven, this evening, if you like."

"Very good, sir."

Then they went out of the room, and the young carver set to work to put the last touches

on the carved sideboard, of which Mr. Shaw was so proud.

As he worked he recalled the fact that Edith had not said a word till she was appealed to, that she had pronounced his work the "best she had ever seen," that her father had snubbed her, and that she looked pale and sad.

What made her sad? What was the matter with her? What reason could there be for an heiress, enjoying an income of so many thousands every year, to be sorrowful?

A year before John would have deemed such a thing impossible. A poor man, finding it difficult to earn his subsistence is apt to imagine that money must bring happiness.

Now, when he was earning more than he needed, and felt positively rich, he had found out that he was not yet happy. He wanted something more, and could not tell exactly what it was, though he was beginning to find it out since he had seen Edith Wallis a second time.

He worked away on his carving, and had it finished in the afternoon, just as Mr. Shaw came in.

Shaw had treated him like an equal throughout his engagement, and John rather liked him; for the speculator was one of those men who, having made their money easily, spend it freely, and are apt to be kind to others.

Shaw looked at the work and praised it highly, then observed:

"I say, Ray, it seemed to me as if you had seen old Wallis before, and didn't like him. Am I wrong?"

"You're right, I have. But I'd rather not say where, Mr. Shaw. Mr. Wallis did not treat me well because I was a poor man, and I don't want to be under him again, if I can help it."

Shaw laughed.

"Oh, nonsense. Business and feeling should never be mixed up. You see, the old fellow has just lost his head-carver, a Swiss—a very smart fellow, too, good as you are, nearly—and he has seen some of your work. He wants to get you badly, and he has offered to pay me quite a snug sum for damages, if I give up my contract with you. I'm telling you this, so that you can make your market."

"Thank you. But why does he want me so badly?"

"Well, you see, he and another man in the East are rivals. One runs the Diamond cars, the other the Emeralds. They're bidding against each other all the time for the best workmen, and I have a sort of idea that old Schmidt, of the Emerald cars, is after you too, and that Wallis is trying to steal a march on him. Oh, he's a shrewd old fellow."

"Then what do you think I'd better do, Mr. Shaw?"

"Do? Go and see him, to be sure. If you play your cards well, you can get what terms you please. Tell him Schmidt offers you double what you make now."

"But that would not be true."

"Oh, well, that makes no difference in business. They all lie. He won't believe you, if you tell the truth, so you may as well follow his lead."

John shook his head.

"I've never found it necessary to lie in business, and I don't want to begin."

"Then you can't cope with Wallis. He has been lying to you already."

"In what?"

"Saying his carver was sick and not expected to live. The man's dead. Died last night. I tell you he wants you badly and you're a fool if you don't make him pay for you."

John hesitated still.

"Mr. Shaw," he said, presently, "may I ask you a question without offense?"

"Certainly, if it's not too personal."

"You say that every one lies in business."

"Certainly."

"Do you?"

Shaw burst out laughing.

"Of course! I'd have a fine time if I didn't."

"Well, then; are you talking business to me now or not?"

Shaw laughed again, more heartily than before.

"I admire your delicacy. You mean—am I lying to you? No, Ray; on my honor, I'm not. I'm going to make old Wallis pay me, not you, and I want to skin the old hunks, that's all. I'm giving you all the points I know. I'll give you another that will be worth money to you. Old Wallis is going to marry off his daughter very soon, and—Why, what's the matter?"

For John had turned deadly pale, and seemed to be gasping for breath.

But the sight of Shaw's surprise did more to bring him to his senses than anything else could have done, so he pressed his hand to his breast and said faintly:

"Nothing, nothing; a little pain around the heart. I'll have to go to the doctor, I believe. I've had it several times lately. There; it's gone. Go on."

He felt as if the room were whirling round, but managed to keep his countenance, though Shaw observed shrewdly:

"Pain round the heart, eh? Hum! That's suspicious, Ray. Confounded pretty girl, too. Ever see her before?"

John felt his color rising, but evaded the inquiry by saying:

"But what has the daughter's marriage to do with my engagement as carver? I don't understand that, Mr. Shaw."

Shaw looked amused.

"Oh, that's the deepness of the old hunks. You don't see it, do you?"

"I confess, I don't."

He had regained his coolness now.

Shaw smiled very knowingly as he began to explain:

"What that old fellow doesn't know about getting the best of a bargain isn't worth knowing. He's a financial genius. You don't see the point yet, do you? Well, I'll show it to you. You know old Wallis is the president of a company?"

"Yes; but what has that to do with his daughter's marriage?"

"This. She's going to be married to young Percy, son of the biggest railroad man out here, and old Wallis has been blowing that he's going to give the young couple the handsomest house in the United States. Do you see the point yet?"

"Not quite."

"Well, I'll make it clearer, then. You know carved work's all the go now. Every one wants it, whether they are judges or not. It's the fashion. And old Wallis is a good judge. He wants to beat everything that has been done before. He's laid out plans for a house that would cost a million, if he had to buy the carvings. Do you see yet?"

"I begin to; but I'm not sure. You mean that he wants to engage me for his private benefit?"

"And make the company foot the bills. That's just it. So you see you can get anything you want out of him. It don't come out of his pocket. He'll employ you ostensibly to direct the carvers in the factory, but really he'll be getting his private carving done at ten per cent. of the real cost. Oh, he's a wary old bird, and knows just how to do the trick."

And the grain speculator seemed to be tickled to death at the smartness of the trick, while Jasper was only shocked at what he heard.

"But, Mr. Shaw," he said, presently, "if I entered into any such arrangement, I should be helping him cheat his own company, shouldn't I?"

Shaw raised his eyebrows as if amazed at his simplicity.

"Of course, but that's no business of yours. That's their funeral. Old Wallis can pull the wool over their eyes, you bet. All you have to do is to pocket your money and obey orders. You're not responsible for his sharp practices."

"I think you're wrong," returned John, gravely. "However, I thank you for what you've said. Good-by."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MILLIONAIRE'S HOUSE.

THE stars were twinkling in the frosty sky that evening as John Ray took his way toward the expensive mansion of old Senator Wallis, with a dull pain round his heart he had never felt before. Edith Wallis was going to be married shortly, and to the only man he had ever seen who had treated him with insolence.

And he, John Ray, was to be employed to make a thing of beauty out of the house in which his rival was to live with the woman John adored!

Yes, his rival! He saw that boldly now; for he had never cared to conceal from himself the fact that he loved Edith Wallis, and this audacious young American was actually thinking, all the way as he went:

"How shall I prevent this marriage? I'm sure she doesn't love him. Who could love a fellow like that? Mean, cowardly, domineering! That's the reason she's so sad. I'm sure of it. She is being forced into this marriage."

Which was jumping at a conclusion with great rapidity; but John was young and very much in love, besides being justly elated with the way he had got on in life since he had come to Chicago, and he actually could not see any reason why he should consider Edith Wallis "above him in the social scale," as long as the American doctrine that one man is as good as another was supposed to regulate our state of life.

He talked to himself to keep up his courage in this strain, but it was no use. He could not disguise the fact that however affairs might be between this young lady and Percy, there was no possibility that they could be twisted to favor any aspirations of John Ray, by the most liberal construction.

The young lady had only seen him thrice in her life—first as a common tramp, second as a workman discharged by her father, and thirdly that morning.

Had she recognized him then?

Her father had pretended not to, and she had given no sign but a glance, and on that single glance John was even now building all sorts of air-castles.

But he could not cheat himself. He knew they were air-castles; and the brightest of his

hopes could not take away the dull pain round his heart as he thought of the words of Shaw:

"Wallis is going to marry off his daughter very soon."

They seemed to be buzzing in his ears as he left the quiet little lodging which he had retained in the household of Abner Jones ever since he had arrived at the city, although he might easily have moved to better quarters. But John was a man who stuck to old friends, and he never forgot that Abner Jones was the first friend he had made in Chicago.

He felt doubtful of his future and as if he needed advice, so he went to the man he thought most capable of giving it—his old schoolmaster.

O'Rourke had become a prominent lawyer in the city, in a peculiar line of practice that seemed to suit him well, and certainly paid better than other branches.

When John came to his office, though it was after dark, he found his friend seated there, with a number of very hard-looking customers round the room, waiting their turn to be interviewed; and as the young man entered, he saw that the lawyer had a pile of ten-dollar bills on the table at his elbow, to which his visitors were adding, as they came up one by one.

O'Rourke looked up and smiled in his genial way, remarking:

"Is it yerself, now? And what'll ye be wanting, me boy? This isn't the time for a man like you to be coming to see an old friend; but, all the same, ye're welcome. Come inside."

As he spoke, he gathered up the bills and crumpled them in his pocket without looking; then rose up, saying:

"The rest of ye'll wait till I've seen this gentleman."

"But, counselor," objected one man with a patch over his eye, "Mike's going to be tried to-morrow, and I hain't told ye what we kin prove—"

"Time enough when we git into coort," answered O'Rourke, shortly. "D'ye think it takes me an hour to make out a defense? Ye'll wait, or ye can go to Tim Flynn. I'm not touting for fees to-night. I've got all I can attend to."

And without waiting for further talk he led John to an inner room, lit a cigar, shoved a box of them over to his visitor, and said:

"Those divils think they own me, body and soul, after they've paid a paltry retainer! Go ahead, for I know ye want advice, from the look of your face."

"Are those your clients?" asked John, rather curiously.

O'Rourke nodded with a grim smile.

"Ay, ay, that's a good word, but bedad, I'm over-proud of 'em, though they pay well enough. Didn't ye know I had the biggest criminal practice in Chicago? Yes, and that's saying a good deal, for there's heaps of wickedness here. Well, what d'ye want, John?"

John related what had happened that day, and concluded:

"You gave me advice once when I was a boy, that has placed me where I am. Now tell me, shall I accept Wallis's offer and make the most of him, or shall I reject it?"

"That depends," said O'Rourke, dryly.

"On what?"

"Whether ye ask me advice as a criminal lawyer or a gentleman."

"As my old friend, who told me the right way to get on in the world."

"What d'ye call getting on in the world?" asked the lawyer, keenly. "Making money or keeping yer self-respect?"

"Both," returned John.

O'Rourke shook his head.

"Ye can't reconcile 'em. I tried it, and found I had to give up one or the other, so I made the money."

And he gave vent to slight sigh while John asked him, earnestly:

"What? Do you mean that it is not possible to become rich without losing one's self-respect?"

"I said no such thing. But then I'm a lawyer, ye know, bad luck to me, and I see the dark side of human nature. I'd recommend ye to go to old Wallis and make all ye can out of him, as long as ye keep within the law."

"But how shall I do that?"

"Get all ye can in the way of wages, and if the old man wants ye to do private work, refuse."

"That's just what I thought of doing."

"Exactly. The law's only common sense and justice, after all. But have a good contract, or he'll skin ye alive."

"Suppose I submit it to you before I sign it, O'Rourke?"

"I'll tell ye if it's good or not. Is that all?"

"That's all."

"Then good-night. I'd like to have more talk with ye, but there's about half the original forty thieves in the office, all waiting to throw ten-dollar bills at me, and as long as I've the name, I may as well take the money."

And he showed John out, the clients nudging each other, and murmuring comments on the nature of the case on which a consultation

had been held, most of them uniting in the belief that John must be some noted forger or confidence-man, on account of his fine clothing and cultivated face.

John resumed his walk to the quarter where he knew the senator lived, and soon after reached the house, a large stone mansion, standing in the midst of its own grounds, surrounded with dark cones of evergreens, on which the snow hung, twinkling in the glare of the gas-lamps, while everything in and about the house spoke of the wealth of its owner, not to say of his ostentation.

For the Wallis mansion, with its semicircular Corinthian porch, its pillared front and carved stone trimmings, had the reputation of costing more money than any house in Chicago.

A wide carriage-sweep ran up to the door, and the stone steps were wide enough for a company of soldiers to march up abreast, while the black waiter who opened the door had a severe and haughty aspect, as if unused to bowing to any one who did not come in a carriage of some kind.

When he saw John, however, and heard his name, he was exceedingly polite, saying:

"Mr. Ray, sah? yes, sah. The senator give orders, sah, you was to be shown into the lib'ry, sah. De senator is at dinnah, sah, and will be out d'reckly, sah."

So the young man was ushered into a library about forty feet long, and half as wide, where the foot sunk into deep carpets, while a bright wood-fire burned in a tiled fire-place, and the walls were covered with books in gorgeous bindings, statuettes and busts on brackets, and the most luxurious of reading-chairs and low library tables, here and there, scattered about.

It was a room that looked as if a great author might have written in it for years and never wished to leave it, yet at the same time there was a suspicious air of cleanliness and brand-new quality about it that gave one the impression that literary work was the last thing ever attempted in that chamber of luxury.

John went in and remained by the fire, looking over the room and wondering to himself what the senator did while in it, for he had by no means the aspect of a man of letters, and his reputation was quite the reverse.

He finally concluded that the library was probably only another form of ostentation in the millionaire's case, in which he was probably about right, and then he began to wonder when the senator was coming, for the house was very silent, and the ticking of the clock on the mantle was the only sound audible.

He had noticed double swinging-doors as he came in, and attributed the silence to them, and the large size of the house.

Then, as he was beginning to grow a little impatient, he heard the sound of a lock on the other side of the room, and a small door that he had not noticed, back among the bookcases, opened, disclosing the figure of Edith Wallis coming toward him, in a long evening-dress of some pale, grayish silk, a bunch of roses at her corsage, her face pale and grave, but wearing the same kindly expression that had first made him fall down and worship her metaphorically.

She came forward with the ease of a woman of the world, saying:

"My father regrets to have kept you so long, Mr. Ray; but he has a business call that will keep him a few minutes more, and has asked me to see you, as I am partly concerned in the matter."

"Yes," said John, clumsily, as she paused. "I believe I know what you would say. You are going to be married, and your father wishes me to decorate your new house."

He spoke in a hard, harsh way, as if he wanted to get through with the subject quickly, and added, shortly:

"I fear I must decline the task, for several reasons."

Edith had raised her brown eyes to his with a look of surprise as he spoke, and the color welled up over her face. For a moment she looked angry; then the feeling changed to something else, as she asked him, with a slight smile:

"Might I ask what those reasons are?"

"I prefer to keep them to myself, unless you insist," he replied, constrainedly, for he felt that he was getting on very delicate ground.

"Oh, certainly not," she retorted, a little sarcastically. "It is not for me to seek to penetrate your motives. But you are mistaken in one thing. I am not going to be married, and—"

John flushed up to his temples, and he exclaimed excitedly:

"Not going to be married? Oh, say that again, for God's sake!"

He had forgotten himself in his first flush of excitement, and was only recalled to his senses by the look of utter amazement in her face, as she drew back and looked at him, as if doubting her hearing.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, in his confusion; "it was Mr. Shaw told me, and I thought—I thought—"

"What did you think?" she asked, still more coldly, and just at that moment the double

doors banged, and into the room bustled Senator Wallis, who stopped short and regarded the two with the most intense amazement.

CHAPTER X. HARD BARGAINING.

In truth the situation was equivocal. The senator, worth several hundred thousand dollars, coming into his own library, found his daughter alone with a young man, their faces both flushed deeply, the young man looking as if he hardly knew what he was doing, while the young lady had a singular expression, more than half angry and yet smiling.

No wonder the senator stopped and frowned, as he ejaculated:

"What's the matter here?"

John could not answer, and he did not know what to do. He turned crimson from the pink of his previous flush and was about to stammer out something stupid when, to his intense relief, Edith said, with a smile to her father:

"Matter? Why, nothing—I've been trying to persuade Mr. Ray to accept your offer, and he was just telling me how busy he is; that's all."

"Oh," said the senator, dryly, "is that all? Did you tell him what I want of him?"

"I had no time when you came in, sir; so I'd better leave you to do it yourself. You know I dislike business."

Then she swept away to the door and was going out, much to John's secret disappointment, when her father said, in a fretful way:

"What's the matter with you? You promised to stay here. You're as much interested as I am in this, and it isn't a strict matter of business either."

John was growing more and more puzzled. What in the world was the matter, and what did these people want?

Edith Wallis shook her head in a way that showed she had a good deal of her father's obstinacy, as she answered:

"I told you before I wouldn't stay and help you, and so you must excuse me."

And with that she vanished, while the old senator fumed up and down the room, in a manner so different to his ordinary business air that John was amazed.

The senator, in business, was as hard as a rock, and as cold and methodical as a machine; the same senator, at home in his family, seemed to be under the dominion of his only daughter; fretting under the bit, but unable to have his own way, John was very nearly being amused at him, as he bustled up and down the room, and muttered to himself broken sentences, seeming to forget the presence of the young man till Ray coughed to attract his attention, as delicately as he could.

Then the old senator, in his turn, seemed to be confused, for he said, hurriedly:

"I beg your pardon, young man—I mean Mr. Ray. Sit down, sit down. I want to talk to you."

Then he was off again, fuming round the room, while John quietly took off his overcoat, sat down by the fire and made himself at home, calmly awaiting the senator's next communication.

Now that Edith was gone, he felt very differently. It had become a question of business solely, and a contest of wits between him and the astute old man whom he suspected even now of playing a part to gain time.

In this he was confirmed a moment later by the old gentleman saying:

"Take a cigar, won't you? I'll have to ask you to excuse me a moment. Here's the box; help yourself."

And, so saying, he pushed a low table over to the young man, and bustled out of the room by the folding doors, while John took him at his word and said to himself as he began to smoke:

"There's something under all this. I wonder what's the matter in this house?"

He had time to smoke his cigar half through before the senator came back, looking vexed, but having resumed his usual hard business mask and sat down opposite to him, observing:

"Very sorry I kept you waiting. Now we can talk business."

"That is why I came here," said John, looking the old man in the eye.

The senator immediately smiled in his most fascinating business way, and began, just as if he were in the office:

"Now, my dear sir, I'm going to treat you with perfect frankness, as between man and man. My motto has always been that in business it is best to be perfectly open. In a career of forty years I have never yet had occasion to tell a falsehood. What do you think of that, now?"

"I think it is very wonderful," said John, quietly, "and very much to your credit, if you can say it conscientiously."

He laid a slight emphasis on the last word, and Senator Wallis replied briskly:

"Certainly, certainly, or I shouldn't say it. Every one who knows me knows that my word is as good as my bond. I couldn't carry on business on any other terms. Why, I'm an elder in the church, Mr. Ray. Did you know it?"

"No, sir. I didn't."

His tone was as dry as ever, and he kept his eye on the old millionaire's face.

Wallis took up a cigar, and lighted it, to gain time, saying:

"How do you like these cigars, Ray?"

"Pretty well, sir."

"Ought to be good. Cost eighty dollars a thousand. I remember the time when I couldn't afford anything but a clay pipe—eh, Ray? Oh, I'm not ashamed of those days. I know what it is to work hard, or I wouldn't be where I am."

John made no answer, though he saw that the senator wanted him to speak.

Presently the old gentleman observed:

"I suppose you'd like to know what I want you to do. Wouldn't you?"

"That is why I came here, sir. You asked me to do so."

"Exactly. Well, what did my daughter say to you when she came in just now?"

"Very little, sir, before you came in."

"But what was it? Did she tell you that she was going to be married?"

"No, sir."

John did not tell all she had said, for he felt that there was something in the wind on that very subject.

The old senator gave a sort of grunt.

"Confounded mock modesty. I suppose all girls are the same. Well, she is going to be married. I suppose you've heard it. It's all over the city, I believe."

"I've heard of it, sir," replied the young man, steadily, "but of course I attach no importance to rumors."

"Quite right. Nobody's business but mine; but they will talk. Yes, she's going to be married, and I'm going to give her a house, so that she may never have to ask any one else for a home. My daughter could be a duchess if I chose; but I'm not going to have her looked down on by any English snobs."

Then he puffed away at his cigar in an angry manner, as if brooding over something or other, and John observed rather sharply:

"Well, sir, what do you want of me? I've other business, if you are not ready to close our matters?"

"I want you to take the position of chief carver to our company and name your own terms," replied the senator, with a visible effort.

"There, it's out. Now don't be extravagant. I know just what you're making. What are your terms for a ten years' contract?"

"That depends, sir."

"On what?"

"On what I have to do."

"You'll have to design all the carvings for our cars, superintend the men in the execution, and give your whole time to the company or its officers."

"Or its officers? In what capacity?" asked John, quietly.

The little question seemed to upset the millionaire's composure, for he answered, irritably:

"In what capacity? What do you mean? I don't understand your question."

"I mean that, if I am to give my whole time to the business of the company, I am willing to do so; but if I am employed on the private affairs of its officers, I shall expect extra compensation from them."

Old Wallis looked at him keenly while he was speaking, his thin lips closely compressed, his cold gray eyes watching John intently, and answered:

"Well, well, of course, that goes without saying. I don't want you to work for nothing. I'll pay you as much as you have been getting, if I employ you, in addition to your salary from the company. Isn't that fair. You'll have the salary clear, besides your ordinary pay."

John looked at him keenly, as the other was inspecting him, and replied:

"The offer, as far as I am concerned, is a liberal one; but how shall I find time to do the company's work and private carving too?"

"That's none of your business. I attend to that. I'm president of the company, and control three-fourths of the stock. If I choose to order you to do anything, that's my business, and I'll see that no one interferes with you. Now, then, what terms do you want?"

John blew out a volume of smoke as he answered:

"I don't think that I could enter into any agreement with you, senator."

"Why not? why not?" asked Wallis, in an irritable tone.

"Because I should not be a free man in regard to my work."

"What do you mean, sir?" What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Simply this. If I engage to do the work of the company, and an outside party comes to me to ask me to do something, I can take his work or refuse it, just as I like, for it would be understood that I should do it in overtime, after the company was served."

"Yes. Well?"

"But if I contract to serve this company and its officers, any one of them can call me off my company work at any time, and a dispute arises at once."

The senator uttered a sigh of relief.

"Oh, is that all? We can get over that very easily. I'll make it the company, and its President. I'm the only person you'll have to work for besides the company; and the work on the cars won't amount to very much, you know. Come, I'll make you an offer, and be liberal. I'll give you three thousand a year as chief carver to the company, and ten dollars a day for all my private work. How will that suit you, Mr. Ray?"

"It will not suit at all," answered the young man, calmly.

"Why not? why not? It's twice as much as you're getting. You'll make six thousand a year; much more than I made at your age."

"That's not the question, sir."

"What is then? What is?"

"Simply this," said John, and as he spoke he rose up. "Not a year ago I was discharged from your shop for no cause, by you, at the solicitation of a man whose life I had saved at the same time with your own. I was a poor man then, and you did not want me; so you treated me as one who had no rights. Now you want me, and cannot do without me. Then you must pay for me. I'll enter your company's service on these conditions, and no others. For my salary as chief carver I'll take six thousand a year, and not a penny less. For private work, I will only do it when I please, and I will not do it for less than twenty dollars a day. Those are my terms, and I'll give you three days to think over them. When you come to them, I will take a ten-years' written contract. That's all, Mr. Wallis. Good-night."

And so saying, John took up his hat and coat, put them on, and was just leaving the room, when the old senator, who had appeared completely upset for once in his life, ejaculated:

"Don't be so hasty, young man. Don't throw away such a chance. Be reasonable. Why, you're asking nearly fifteen thousand dollars a year; half as much as I make myself. Come down. I'll give you six thousand as carver, and twenty a day for private work. That's reasonable."

"You forget," said John, turning at the door, "that you are not the only one in the world who wants my work. There is Mr. Schmidt, for instance—"

The senator jumped up, his eyes all sparkling with eagerness.

"His company isn't good, Mr. Ray. I wouldn't trust him. He'll make all sorts of promises, but they won't be kept. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make it a round ten thousand, and pay you stock at par if you like. I want your services, so you can make your market. How will that do?"

John remembered Shaw's advice, and yet was almost amazed at his success. The mere mention of Wallis's rival had caused the President of the Diamond Car Company to come down at once, though John had not said whether he had received an offer from Schmidt. Clearly there was something in the wind, and the young man saw that he had a great opportunity before him. So he shook his head, saying:

"I have mentioned my terms, sir, and have not asked you to close with them at once, inasmuch as other offers may be made to me within the next three days—"

"I tell you Schmidt's company isn't to be relied on," interrupted the senator, eagerly. "Look at the market, man. Our stock sells at sixty-five premium, and theirs below par. They'll make you all sorts of promises—"

"How do you know what they have promised me?" asked John, quietly, and again the question seemed to confuse old Wallis, so that he turned red and stammered out:

"Never mind how I know. I know, and I can give you the very figures they have offered you."

"Indeed?" said John, incredulously, and still more suspicious. "If you were to name them, I might be able to judge."

The senator looked at him shrewdly, with a certain admiration in his glance, as he said:

"You're sharp, young man, very sharp, but I don't dislike you for it. Every man for himself in business. Schmidt has offered you a thousand dollars a month, five hundred payable in stock, with a seat in the board at the meeting next January. I know all these things, and more than you think. His stocks are only at eighty-seven, so his six thousand a year nominal is only worth five thousand two hundred and—"

"And six thousand cash," returned John, interrupting, "which makes eleven thousand, senator. You see you'll have to come up on your figures. I really don't see that we can close to-night. Why not write me a letter with a definite offer. There's no hurry."

"Because I made up my mind to close to-night," retorted the senator, in an irritable way. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go one better than Schmidt's offer. I'll pay you in our stock. How will that do?"

"Not at all," said John, quietly. "How am I to know you won't run it down in the market on me, after I've signed the contract. I'll tell you what I'll do—"

"Yes, yes, that's right. Talk freely, young

man. No one is listening. What will you do? Now be reasonable."

"I'll take the same figures that, according to you, Schmidt has offered, with the proviso that, if the stock drops below par, I am to be paid in cash. That is the best I can do."

"And will you sign at once, if I say yes?" asked the senator, slowly.

"If you wish," was the cold reply; "but I am not by any means anxious, I can assure you."

"Will you sit down and smoke another cigar, while I go up-stairs a moment?" asked the old millionaire, smoothing his chin thoughtfully.

"Certainly, sir."

And John sat down, while old Wallis left the room by the folding doors, looking worried and anxious.

As for Ray, he could hardly understand his good fortune yet, and, while he was puzzling over it, he heard a ring at the door-bell, soon followed by a knock at the library door, when the dignified black waiter entered in an obsequious way, saying:

"I beg pardon, sah, indeed, sah, but de gentleman said it was important, sah, so I took de letter, sah."

And he handed John a letter directed to him and marked in the corner:

"IN HASTE."

"Who brought this, asked Ray.

"Messenger-boy, sah. Said he hunted you all over de city, sah. Any answer, sah? Boy waiting, sah."

John opened the note and read:

"Don't close with Wallis till you have seen me. I'll better his best. AUGUST SCHMIDT."

The letter was written on Palmer House paper, and as an after-thought the writer had scribbled:

"Shall stay here till you come."

John turned to the waiter.

"Tell the boy to take back for answer simply—"

"All right."

"Very good, sah."

And the dignified waiter vanished, while John sat thinking.

"There's some mystery here. Schmidt must have sent me a letter which Wallis has intercepted, or something of the sort, and Wallis thinks I've got it. I wish I knew what to do."

But before he had decided, the old senator came in again, looking as if he had made up his mind to something which went against the grain, and said:

"I consent to your terms. Here is the contract ready. Read it and sign it."

"Pardon me," said John, quietly. "Since you went away I have received a note which alters the case. Mr. Schmidt is waiting for me at the Palmer House, and offers to do better still."

Senator Wallis uttered an angry oath and seemed thoroughly enraged at last.

CHAPTER XI.

CLOSING THE BUSINESS.

"CONSARN his skin!" ejaculated the old man, forgetting his manners and lapsing into old phrases. "How dare he follow a man into my house? Who brought the letter?"

"A messenger-boy."

"No, no. I mean who gave it to you?"

"Your waiter, sir."

"Con-sarn his—"

And the senator, pale to the lips with rage, rushed out, leaving the contract on the table, to swear at the dignified but now completely cowed waiter, who could not understand his master's sudden explosion of rage, and stammered:

"Please, sah, you told me, sah, to treat de gemman civil, sah, and—"

"Con-sarn your stupid black mug!" shrieked the angry senator, shaking his fist; "did I tell you to give him letters from my business rivals to spoil a bargain, just as it was made? You good-for-nothing he-mule, why didn't you tell the boy he wasn't here, consarn you?"

"Please, sah, I didn't know, sah," the poor darky stammered, gray with fear. "Thought he was a friend of yours, sah—"

"Friend!" cried the senator, fiercely. "You black idiot, I never had a friend. I—"

Then he became sensible that his voice was too loud, and he cooled down, frothing at the lips, as he added:

"You make such a mistake again, and out you go, you idiot. Come and ask for orders if you're in doubt."

Then he went away up-stairs, and John, who had listened to the whole of this edifying conversation, took up the contract, murmuring:

"Well, I needn't have any scruples at getting the best of him by any means I can find. The old hunksl!"

Then he looked over the contract and found that, under it, he was to receive all his pay from the Diamond Car Company, and be subject to the orders of no one but the president, whom he was engaged to obey strictly at all times, for the period of two years, at the end of which time his engagement was to cease.

"Two years—not ten," he said to himself. "I

wonder what that means? I'm glad I got that letter in time."

Then he followed the senator's advice by lighting a fresh cigar, and sat down to wait for his coming, more resolved than ever to bring the proud old man to his terms.

Minute after minute passed; and at last he heard the senator's voice, saying:

"Well, come along, then. He'll do it for you, when he wouldn't for me."

The voice was in the outer hall, and very soon after the old man came in, holding the door open for no less a person than Edith Wallis, who sailed in, looking colder and prouder than John had ever seen her, and who said to him, in a distant way:

"My father has asked me to witness your contract, Mr. Ray, if you are satisfied with it."

As she spoke, she sunk down in a large easy-chair and busied herself in smoothing out her skirts, keeping her eyes averted from him.

John was puzzled.

He knew that old Wallis had brought in his daughter as an auxiliary, in the hope that Ray would not hold out before a lady, and the senator's words confirmed him, as the old man said, in a careless, matter-of-fact way:

"I suppose you've read the contract. It's pretty hard; but since I've come to your terms you can't refuse to sign it. My daughter will witness it."

John turned red. He did not like to dispute before a lady, but there was something in the knowledge that Edith Wallis was—according to her father—going to be married to Stephen Percy, that irritated him, so he said:

"I beg your pardon. That contract is for two years. I said ten."

The young lady raised her eyes to his for a moment, and dropped them again; but in that glance he read something he had never seen there before, a look of meaning, secret and confidential, that he could not fathom. It was even encouraging to him to persist in his demand, and he went on to the senator:

"If you will alter that contract to ten years instead of two, I'm willing to sign it now."

The senator hesitated. Something was evidently in the way, and he turned to his daughter inquiringly; but she was looking at the fire in a careless way, and he fretfully asked:

"Well, what shall I do, Edith?"

"I'm sure I don't care," she answered, in the most tranquil tone. "I've told you I never interfere in your business."

"But this is yours, child," he retorted, in a very irritable manner. "You're set on the house, and—"

He stopped short as she turned and looked at him as only a woman can, and he grumbled to himself:

"Confound the whole business. It will cost me more annoyance than—"

Then he seemed to make up his mind, for he took up the contract, put in the required alteration, and said to John, testily:

"There, there! You're the most extortionate young man I ever met in all my life, but I can't help myself. There it is. Sign it. I take one copy; you the other."

John looked over the contracts once more very carefully, and at last affixed his signature, when the old senator uttered a long sigh of relief, and observed, with a chuckle:

"There, it's over now, and I don't mind saying I'm glad of it. The company will growl, but we can stand that—eh, Ray? Edith, my dear, sign here. This is your copy, Ray. Old Schmidt will be furious, won't he? Confound him! he can't get the best of me, can he? What, Edith, are you going so soon?"

For she had risen up to leave the room, looking colder than before.

"Is there any reason I should stay?" she asked, looking at him in the same way she had shown ever since she had told John she was not to be married.

"Why, of course there is. You want to give Ray your ideas about the house, don't you? Now we've got him, we may as well use him."

"I suppose you are competent to explain that to him, are you not?" she asked. "Besides, there is plenty of time for all that. We've not even selected the land yet."

"No; but we'll do it to-morrow," retorted her father, joyfully. "I know the site—the very best in Chicago. I'm not going to do things by halves. If I build a house for my only daughter to be married in, I'll take care it shall be the best money can buy—eh, Ray? What do you think of it?"

"He doesn't think anything about it," the young lady answered, hastily. "It is not a subject on which to ask his opinion, and if you insist on it, I shall leave the room."

The old gentleman chuckled and rubbed his hands. John was never more impressed with the hollow insincerity of his business character and the marvelous change that had come over the man in his own house under his daughter's eye.

"All right," he said, "all right, all right. I suppose all you girls are the same; but as long as you all get married it don't make much difference. I'm not going to have old Percy say he did any better for his son than I did for my

daughter. Confound him! I've got as much money as he has, and I'll put up such a house as this country has never seen. Eh, Ray? We can do it, my boy, you and me together. What d'ye say, Edith, can we, or can't we? What d'ye think, Ray? Here's a young lady so proud she won't get married before—"

"I've told you to stop. You won't. Very well—good-evening," cried the young lady, in a tone of real indignation, and she swept out of the room, followed by the chuckle of the old gentleman, who said:

"I say, Ray, women are queer creatures. I sometimes think I'll never understand my own daughter. Do you ever drink? Yes. We'll have some wine. Now the business is settled, I want to have a confidential talk with you."

And within ten minutes after, John Ray, the whilom tramp, was seated opposite the man who had just contracted to pay him twelve thousand dollars a year in stocks that might be worth double the money, as familiar as if he had known him all his life, and still wondering where lay the secret of all his sudden luck.

The old senator had evidently been at dinner and drinking wine, during the evening, so that his tongue wagged freely from the first, but John noticed that it never made him let out anything but what he wanted to tell.

"You see," began Wallis, "my daughter is a peculiar girl, but I'm proud of her, for she has all my faults. She's been going to marry young Steve Percy ever so long, and I've only brought it to a head lately. He is a mighty good match for any girl, for his father's worth at least as much as I am, but somehow, Edith didn't take to him till lately."

"Indeed?" said John, who saw that he was expected to say something.

"Yes. It all came out of a trip we took last summer. By the way, the very trip when you saved our train."

It was the first time John had heard him admit any previous knowledge of his visitor, and he went on, confidentially:

"Yes, you thought I didn't know you the other day when I saw you; but I did. I never forget faces. The fact is, young Percy didn't treat you well that time, but I couldn't interfere you know. He was on his father's road, and—"

"I acquit you of all blame there," interrupted John. "I don't think we need discuss the subject any further."

The senator chuckled and took another glass of wine before he answered.

"But that's not what I'm getting at. The fact is, I want to put myself right with you, now we're on confidential relations. You think I treated you ill when I discharged you from my shop, and as a matter of fact I was not a free agent. I was compelled to do it."

John hardly listened to him, for he felt sure the old millionaire was lying to him with a purpose, but old Wallis went on:

"Actual fact, I assure you. If I hadn't done it, Percy would have set his father against me at the election of directors just coming on, and we should have had a great deal of trouble. But I knew your worth well enough, and the result has justified my confidence that you would get on. Now I'll tell you what you've got to do."

"Thank you, returned John. "I should be glad to hear."

"You're not to suppose," said old Wallis, "that we're going to pay you all this large salary for nothing but carving."

"I hardly did suppose so, sir."

"No. The fact is, there will be trouble in the company over this very contract, as soon as the directors meet, unless I disguise the payments in some way, so I'm going to make you hold several offices and do the work of all."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. In the first place you're to be my private secretary. I'm entitled to two thousand for that, and I've always done without any, so that's fair to the company. Then there's chief carver, I'll put at six thousand, and the other four will have to come out of my own pocket, I guess. Pretty cheap house it will be after all, eh, Ray?"

And the old gentleman chuckled as he thought over his bargain till John asked him:

"Your fellow directors, what will they say to all this?"

Wallis lighted a fresh cigar.

"My fellow-directors are men of straw. I can do what I want with them now, and the only obstinate one I've got where I want him."

"And who's that, sir?"

"Young Percy. He's secretary to the company, and you'll have to meet him a good deal. I needn't say to you;—treat him respectfully, because you're sure to have trouble with him if you are not careful."

Hero the senator looked round the room as if apprehensive of hidden listeners, and went on:

"You know he's going to marry my only daughter, Ray; and, between you and me, he's as jealous as a Turk of every young man that comes near her."

"Indeed!"

"Fact. I've had to discharge all the young clerks who had business at the house, as soon as

he had seen them, just because he was afraid of her falling in love with them."

"Why, he must be crazy, sir."

"I sometimes think he is a bit touched, but then his father's worth ten million, and he's promised to give the young man two of them in bonds, the day he marries my daughter, and Percy has agreed to settle it on Edith. So you see that when I do the same—which of course I shall do, there will be four millions of money tied up and depending on that marriage. Do you see?"

"Yes," returned John, rather faintly, with a feeling as if the senator were a long way off from him in his unapproachable wealth.

"And for the sake of two millions for my daughter's fortune, I can afford to stand a good deal from young Percy," pursued the old millionaire, with a sly look in his eyes.

"Yes, sir."

"And so can you, or you're not the man I take you for, Ray."

"So can I what, sir?"

"Stand a good deal from Percy."

"What, sir? Have I got to see much of him?"

"Well, yes. Didn't you know it?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, I'll tell you. You must know that it's all owing to my daughter I went after you at all. Between you and me, she absolutely refused to marry Percy, or any one else, except on certain conditions."

"And those were, sir?"

"That she should have a house built for her according to her own plans; that it should be built by such people as she desired only; and that she was not to be required to marry any one till it was completed in a manner satisfactory to her. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, Percy consented, so did I, and the thing is finally settled. They're to be married as soon as the house is finished and not before."

"And I am to do the decoration?" asked John, feeling a strange tightening about the heart as he spoke.

"Certainly. I don't know I should have finally consented to engage you, if I had not known you to be a good carpenter as well as a carver, so you can save us money after all your salary. You will be able to hurry up the workmen, and will have the house ready for occupation this time twelvemonth. You don't know what a responsibility it is to have a daughter unmarried on your hands, with a crew of fortune-hunters round. I had made up my mind long ago that Edith should never marry any man not as rich as herself, and that's the only reason I finally consented to this Percy affair. I don't like the young man any too well, but he answers the conditions as to money, and I'll have to be content. Now I'll show you the plans of the house."

Then he brought out a large portfolio of drawings, representing the plans, elevations, sections and perspective views of a perfect palace of marble, over which he and John pored for another hour or two.

When the young man at last rose to go away, it was with an impression in his mind that such a house might take ten years to build, and he thought that if Edith Wells were not married till the completion of such a vast pile, she would stand a chance of dying an old maid.

The step of old Wallis was a trifle unsteady as he escorted his guest to the door, and John walked away into the frosty air, feeling as if all that had passed had been a dream.

On his way home he happened to pass by the Palmer House, and the sight of the flaring gas-jet at the door reminded him that he owed an apology, if nothing else, to the gentleman who had sent him a note from that hotel.

He walked into the rotunda, up to the desk of the night clerk, and turned over the leaves of the register, without seeing the name he sought, till the clerk, who knew his face, asked:

"Looking for any one, Mr. Ray?"

"Yes. Mr. August Schmidt of the Emerald Car Company. Isn't he here?"

"Here? No, sir. Hasn't been here for ever so long. Know him well. He couldn't be here without my knowing it."

John was mystified.

"Then how in the world came he to write on your paper and say he'd wait here for me?"

The clerk laughed.

"Oh, hundreds of people use our paper who never lodge here. That's a regular old-fashioned hotel beat. I know Schmidt by sight, and I'll bet you he has not been here in months."

John, more surprised than ever, pulled out the note he had received, and examined it again. There was no possible mistake about it:

"Don't close with Wallis till you have seen me. I'll better his best. AUGUST SCHMIDT."

"Shall stay here till you come."

"Didn't any one call for a messenger boy?" he asked the night-clerk, who replied, with a shrug:

"Certainly, about a dozen. Would you like to see the message-book? I'm very sorry, but the office is closed for the night. In the morning you can hunt it up. Anything wrong?"

"No, no, nothing wrong," answered the young man, absently. "I was only just thinking how this could have come to me—that's all. Good-night."

And he went away from the hotel, more puzzled than ever, trying to understand the business.

"Whoever sent this," he argued to himself, "did it to help me in my cause, and work on the senator's fears. Who can it be? Perhaps O'Rourke."

The thought made him examine the letter again still more closely, but he was compelled to dismiss the idea from his mind, so unlike were the fine characters of the Palmer House note to the bold, sprawling writing of his Irish friend.

"I'll go to him to-morrow and ask him," thought John. "I'll find out who wrote that note, if it takes me a year's work."

CHAPTER XII. DELICATE GROUND.

THE next morning, according to previous agreement, John Ray reported at the offices of the Diamond Car Company, which were distinct from the factory, and the first person he saw was Stephen Percy at the secretary's desk.

The young gentleman looked up at him as if he had never seen him before, twirled his mustache, and observed:

"I suppose you're Mr. Ray, about whom I received a note from the president."

"I am Mr. Ray," returned John; "come to report for orders."

"Very happy to meet you," responded Percy, still twirling his mustache. "I suppose you can go to the factory at once. There's an order for a number of new cars there, and we want to make them beat anything yet produced. I suppose you feel competent to design them?"

"If I had not felt so, I should hardly have signed a contract," said John.

Percy looked surprised.

"A contract? Have you signed one?"

"Certainly. Would you like to see it?"

"If you please. As secretary, I am supposed to know all the details."

John showed him his contract, and Percy looked at him with an expression as if he hardly knew what so say, till the young man had folded it up and put it away in his breast-pocket.

Then he observed, dryly:

"You're getting pretty good pay."

"I should not have come for anything less than good pay," returned John, quietly. "If you will give me a note to the superintendent of the factory, I'll go there at once."

"Certainly," responded Percy, hastily, and he scribbled off a note, with which John took his way to the factory, where, in another hour he was hard at work, designing carvings for the cars, and getting through an amount of work that compelled old Welby, the superintendent, to say to him approvingly:

"I like your work, Mr. Ray. You seem to be a live man, after all. That Swiss was a lazy dog, pottering away at work other men could do better, but you seem to have the trick of getting work out of others as well as yourself. You understand your business. By-the-by, it seems to me I've seen your face before."

"Possibly," returned John, who was not anxious to recall his humiliating exit from the factory, a few months before. "I know a good many people in the city. I'm going to lunch now. Back in an hour if any one wants me."

He went off, and when he came back to the works saw a sleigh standing before the office-door, with Wallis's black driver on the box.

When he went inside, Welby met him with an expression of vexation, saying:

"The president has sent for you, Mr. Ray, and wants you immediately."

"Then he can't have me till I have got through work," said John, in a firm, quiet way. "I shall not be at liberty till three o'clock."

Welby stared.

"But he'll be angry if you send such a message."

"And who is to keep the men at work if I go away?" asked John. "I've not bad time to lay out the drawings, and I'm not going till I've done it."

Then he went up to his room and set to work, while Welby, with a covert grin of approval, muttered:

"That fellow is a worker. The company won't lose on him."

He went out and told the coachman, who drove away, and John kept on at his work for nearly an hour, when the door opened and the office-boy came in with a note, which he laid on the table by the young man, and stood waiting for an answer.

John kept on at his drawing till he had finished what he was at, and then opened the note, which said:

"Miss Wallis's compliments to Mr. Ray, and hopes he will oblige her by coming with her father and herself to select a site for the new house."

John's face flushed as he read it, but he quietly wrote in return:

"Mr. Ray regrets to disoblige Miss Wallis, but his first duty is owing to the company, and he cannot find time till four o'clock, when he will be happy to attend, if Miss Wallis still wishes for his presence."

He sent off the note and worked at his drawings till he had accomplished the task on which he had set his mind when he gave out work to the carvers and found it was five minutes to four, with himself free for the rest of the day.

Then he went down to the factory office and found the sleigh waiting before the door, the black driver stolid and imperturbable as ever.

He made no remark as Ray stepped into the sleigh, but drove round to the Wallis house, where John was shown into the library, to find Stephen Percy, Edith Wallis and the senator together, with an expression on their faces that looked as if a quarrel had just been going on between them all.

"So you're here at last, are you?" sneered Percy, as soon as he entered. "I must say you seem to take your time to obey an order. Mr. Ray."

"Thank you," returned John, coldly; "I was not aware I had received any order from any person competent to give it."

"Didn't you hear that the senator had sent for you, sir?"

John looked at him for a moment, and then, turning to the senator as if the other had not spoken, he said:

"I regret I was not able to come before, sir, but I had to lay out work for the men; and you know our agreement. I am ready now, if you wish."

The senator nodded absently.

"Ay, ay. What do you say, Edith? Shall we go now, before it gets dark?"

"Thank you," she returned, indifferently. "I don't think it makes very much difference. To-morrow will do just as well. Won't it?"

Before her father could answer, Percy broke out, irritably:

"No, it won't. We shall never get through at this rate. I insist on doing what we can to-day, and I can't see why we've waited all this time, to suit the whims of this Mr. Ray."

The senator shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the use of talking, Percy? You know your agreement: Edith is to have her own way, and she's taken a fancy to employ this gentleman's taste. I propose we go now, Edith. Come, come; don't make more trouble."

As he spoke he rose, but the young lady patted her foot on the floor, retorting:

"It's understood I'm to have my way. If Mr. Percy doesn't like it, he has his remedy. I'm not going this afternoon!"

"Then, when will you go?" asked her father, who seemed to be wonderfully patient.

"To-morrow morning, if you please. Make your arrangements with Mr. Ray. If he can come then, I'll be ready."

And so saying, she left the library by the side door, while Stephen Percy, very red in the face, smothered an oath, and the old senator shrugged his shoulders, as he turned to Ray, saying:

"No use talking when ladies are round. Can you come to-morrow at nine?"

"Why don't you tell him to come?" asked Percy, passionately. "Heavens and earth! has it come to this, that you have to make a request where you ought to give an order? I'm sure you pay this man enough without being at his beck and call."

John waited till he had finished and then said to the senator:

"I think I can come at nine, sir; but I shall have to be back at the factory by twelve, to lay out more work."

"Work be hanged!" interrupted Percy, rudely. "You're subject to orders. Don't you know that? You'll arrange your work to suit us, not yourself."

John smiled, and went on to Wallis:

"Will that suit you, sir?"

"Certainly, certainly," was the hasty answer. "Of course the company's work comes first. I shall expect you at nine, sharp."

Then John bowed and backed out of the room, followed by an evil scowl from Percy, who looked as if he could gladly have stabbed him, while the old gentleman had a worried expression on his face as if he did not like the looks of things.

As John passed out through the hall, the black porter jumped up from his chair to usher him out, and as he was unlocking the door said in a whisper:

"Miss Edy, sah, she say give you dis, sah."

And with that slipped into his hand a note which made John thrill all over as he realized that there was a secret between him and the heiress.

He put it in his pocket and did not read it till he was out of sight from the house, when he discovered only the words inside:

"Don't approve any site till I say yes. E. W."

CHAPTER XIII. BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

JOHN'S heart beat violently as he read the words and began to put together the facts which he had found out within the last few days.

That the match between Edith and Percy was distasteful to the lady, any one could see, and yet she had consented to it on certain conditions.

John began to see what these conditions meant. The girl was resisting her fate as long as she could, and trying to weary out Percy with delays, while the father was evidently playing a double game, trying to keep the peace between the two parties, afraid of each.

For it was certain to John's mind that the old man must have some cause to fear Stephen Percy, or he would not have submitted to the young man's masterful tone in his own house.

Pondering over these things, John took his way to his friend O'Rourke, and found that gentleman alone in his office, for once in his life, and ready to listen.

He showed O'Rourke his contract, over which the lawyer glanced keenly, and then remarked:

"He's got the best of ye, as I thought he would, me boy."

"How? Why? Isn't it a good contract?"

"Yes. But suppose either of ye breaks it, where's the damages to come from? Ye'd have to sue for them, and ye'd have as much chance of getting anything as a poor man usually has with a rich one."

John looked blank.

"But there's no reason why they should break it, is there?"

"It's hard to say. The Diamond Car Company isn't famous for paying high wages, and this is princely. How did ye get it?"

John told him what had transpired, and especially about the mysterious note from the rival car company, and O'Rourke listened attentively.

When he had finished, the lawyer said:

"Have ye the note about ye?"

"Here it is."

O'Rourke looked at it carefully, and finally observed:

"If ye'll leave that with me, I'll find out who wrote it. I've an idea. And so ye say there was a row in the house to-day, about your not coming?"

"Not exactly about that, but about something or other; for all three looked ill-tempered as I came in."

"Even the angel in petticoat? Hum! and she sent ye two notes, did she? Can I see them?"

John colored.

"No. I'd rather not. You know a lady's notes are different from business."

He did not like to own that he had them both pressed over his heart, together with the memorable one which she had sent him long before, when he had only been a discharged workman, without friends.

"Oh, very well," returned O'Rourke, dryly. "I'm not curious, only I've an idea in my head; that's all. Now, what are ye going to do, John?"

"Attend to my business and earn my money, I suppose. What else?"

"Earn your money? Ye can't earn any such pay at your work, me boy. There's something behind all this, or ye couldn't have got the best of old Wallis like ye seem to have. Ye'll be sucked dry like an orange, mark me words, and find yerself out of work when ye taste expect it. Are ye going out to-morrow with them to select a site for the house?"

"I am."

"And I suppose ye'll be hard to please?"

"At least—"

"Well, what?"

"At least I ought to, if I obey instructions in a note received after I left the house."

"Aha! a note? Where is it?"

With some reluctance, John brought out his last note, and O'Rourke looked it over hungrily, till he turned to the young man with a smile, saying:

"Ye'd better do as the lady tells ye. Ye've a friend at court, will maybe carry ye through."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. Ye'll find out some day. Ye don't need legal advice, young man. Just go home and attend to your business. Hold your peace and ye'll come out all right. I'm busy, John."

And he turned to his books, while the young man went away, not clearly understanding what was the matter, and had not made up his mind what to do when he reported at Senator Wallis's house next morning.

Once more he was shown into the library, where he found Stephen Percy alone, in the worst of humors, striding up and down the room, and chewing the end of a half-smoked cigar.

He favored John with a scowl as he saw him, and observed, sarcastically:

"Oh, you're here on time for once, are you? Now I want you to understand one thing to-day. I'm secretary of the company, and you're our employee, so you don't want to be putting in your ear into conversation until you're spoken to."

John smiled with as much coolness as he could show, despite the irritation he felt at the other's tone, and replied:

"If I'm spoken to I shall certainly reply. As you say, you are secretary of the company, and as such my official superior at the office. If you

choose to find fault with my work at the factory, you have a right so to do; but here, in my private capacity as a gentleman—"

Percy interrupted him with a coarse laugh, as he retorted:

"A gentleman! That's good!"

John flushed scarlet, and for a moment felt inclined to knock Percy down, but he controlled himself sufficiently to reply:

"Very well. Perhaps I was wrong. Probably you call yourself a gentleman, and if so, I own I'm not like you. But I was about to say this, sir—"

As he spoke, he came up to Percy with such menace on his face that the other recoiled a pace, as John said:

"In my private capacity as a man I'm as good as you are, and if you think you can insult me because you're richer than I, you'll find yourself in trouble. Do you hear me?"

Percy had turned a little paler than his wont, but he answered scornfully:

"I don't fight with any but my equals. You'll have to keep your place in my company, and as for your threats, I shall simply hand you over to the police, if you try to execute them. You'll find that it won't do to buck against me, my friend, without you've a great many more friends than I think you have."

John eyed him from head to foot with a glance of intense scorn.

"Oh, is that your idea?" he said, quietly. "I did not think you were a coward."

And he went to the window and sat down, paying no more attention to Percy than if he had not been in the room; till they were interrupted by the entrance of the old senator, who hustled in, with his daughter, crying in his "domestic" manner, so different from his "business" mask:

"Come, Percy, here we are. Good-morning, Mr. Ray! All ready for the momentous decision this morning. Sleigh's waiting. Now, Edith, don't quarrel with Steve this morning. Have plenty of time after you are married to do all that. Come, Ray, we've no time to lose. I've a board meeting at noon, and we're half an hour late now. You're expected to give us all the benefit of your taste in everything, and the young people will give you their instructions as soon-as the site's fairly selected. Come along."

And he hustled them off to the sleigh in a state of nervous anxiety to keep his daughter and Percy from further exhibitions of spleen before Ray, and in a few moments more they found themselves gliding down the road, the senator and his daughter on the back seat, while John and his rival were seated side by side.

This state of things naturally did not tend to enliven Percy's conversational powers, and John would have been equally dumb but for the fact that, in the packing into the big sleigh, Edith Wallis had been set opposite to him, and at once began to talk to him, with a freedom and gayety so infectious that he could not resist it, and talked to the best extent of his knowledge, which was by no means contemptible.

Thus it happened that they were both on the best of terms, when the senator suddenly interrupted them in a nervous manner by saying:

"Mr. Ray, excuse me, but this is the first site. Percy, how do you like it?"

They had drawn up opposite a large, vacant lot, which—a very unusual thing in Chicago—was slightly elevated above the street level, and the senator began to talk volubly about it to Percy and his daughter, trying to engage them both in conversation, and to keep Ray out, while the latter young man lay back and watched Percy's face, which was pale with spleen as he replied in sullen monosyllables to the senator, while Edith seemed to have changed in a moment to a statue of frozen reserve.

Percy seemed to be nearly frantic with jealousy, John was quietly amused at the whole business, and in the midst of all the sullessness Edith suddenly said:

"I don't care whether you build here or not. I'll leave it to Mr. Ray. He has better taste than all of us. I'll abide by his decision."

John glanced at Percy and saw that the young man had turned deadly pale and was gnawing his lip, glaring at the snow in savage silence, so he said, with a view to soothe matters:

"It is hardly my place to presume to give an opinion, Miss Wallis, when Mr. Percy is here. I am not either an architect or landscape gardener; though I am not unfamiliar with their subjects. The site seems to me to be the best I have seen in the city, if properly treated."

To his surprise, Percy turned round on him and shook his hand warmly:

"Thank you, sir, thank you. You're a man of taste. There, Edith, you can't go back on your word. The site is chosen."

Edith Wallis cast a singular glance at him, and her lips curled with a derisive sort of smile as she answered:

"It is, is it? I thought I had to decide it."

"But you agreed to leave it to Ray as an expert, and you can't go back on it," cried Percy.

"I appeal to you, senator, isn't that fair?"

"Certainly, certainly," answered old Wallis, with equal eagerness. "Come, Edith, come."

We've fooled over this long enough. Give your decision. Is it yes or no?"

Edith Wallis turned to John Ray.

"Do you like this for a site of a house?"

"I do," he answered, looking in her dark eyes and wondering what he saw there.

"Very well, then," she said, "let it be so. You shall build the house, Mr. Ray, to please your own taste, for I find I can trust to it. Don't you think so, Percy?"

And she turned to her now placated betrothed with an arch smile that captivated him instantly.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXPLOSION AT LAST.

So they went peacefully home from a drive that had promised nothing but ill temper, and John found himself left alone in the corner of the sleigh, with no one to talk to; while Miss Wallis seemed to exert herself to entertain Stephen Percy, perfectly ignoring Ray, to such an extent that he, who had been the happiest of mortals an hour before, now felt in his own person the same feelings that had shown so plainly in Percy's face while Edith Wallis had been talking to Ray.

But John, besides being more sensible than Percy, and gifted, from experience, with more self-control, had the added reason to conceal his feelings that he knew he was a poor man, while Percy was a gilded young millionaire.

His face betrayed nothing but quiet and respectful reserve as he sat back in the corner of the sleigh, till they got back to the Wallis mansion, when the senator observed indifferently:

"We shall not want you any more to-day, Ray. You can go to the factory."

And John went away, feeling as if some one had poured cold water down his back, for, after the senator had spoken, no one so much as nodded to him, and even Edith Wallis, usually so kind and thoughtful, pretended to be too busy talking to Percy so much as to turn her head to Ray.

He went off toward the factory in a decidedly unamiable frame of mind, realizing that he was desperately in love with a woman he had no earthly chance of winning, and ready, in his desperation of spirit, to wish he had never seen her; in which mood he went to work, and kept at it till darkness compelled him to light the gas, forgetting all about his meals, not heeding the six o'clock whistle, till he was roused by the voice of old Seth Welby behind his elbow, saying:

"Well, well, I thought I could work, but you beat me. You were nearly getting locked up for the night, only I saw your gas lighted. What makes you work so hard?"

"To keep me from thinking," was the half-absent-minded reply. "What's the time, Mr. Welby?"

"Nearly seven. Why, you've a regular stock of drawings there, enough to keep the carvers at work a week, I should say. At this rate you'll be able to go on a trip very soon."

"A trip? Where?" asked John, vaguely.

"To buy wood, of course. That's part of your business. Berger was quite a judge of woods, and got in the cheapest lots of any man, I ever saw. You'll have to go out as soon as the lumber season opens, to look for something new in the hardwood finish."

"The sooner the better," returned Jasper, gloomily, as he rose up and put away his drawing-tools. "I'm getting tired of this place."

And as he went home to his quiet little boarding-house he began to think to himself that perhaps he had done ill to abandon his freedom and independence even for the splendid bribe offered to him, if it were to pay for his peace of mind and compel him to look quietly on and see Stephen Percy making love to Edith Wallis before his eyes, while he had to sit by as if he were a lackey, not fit to be spoken to by his lordly rival.

His angry mood drove him out of the house in the evening to the theater, for the first time in months, where he saw Lawrence Barrett playing Othello, and began to feel for the first time what was the matter with him, as he listened to the words of the poor jealous-frenzied Moor.

He went home gloomier than ever, and dreamed of all sorts of horrors, that night; ate but little breakfast in the morning; and hurried down to the office, when there, in front of the door, just as the day before, stood the big Wallis sleigh, and the black driver tipped his hat respectfully to him and handed him a note.

He trembled all over as he took it, for he thought it was from her, but instead of that it was from the senator, who wrote to him to come up at once and look over the plans, as they were to break ground the next day.

John Ray felt as if he were going to a funeral when he got into that sleigh to go to the millionaire's mansion, and he felt tempted to throw up his place at once rather than go on with what he felt to be torturing work; but there was no help for it now but to go on, so he entered the Wallis domicile with his head up, determined to keep strictly to the line of his duties, and was ushered once more into the library, which he found strewn with plans and

drawings, in the midst of which sat the senator, looking happy and genial to a degree that surprised the young man, while beside him sat his daughter, in the most charming morning-dress imaginable, poring over the drawings likewise.

John felt his heart jump as he looked at her, and when she raised her brown eyes to his with the sweetest of smiles he could have fallen on his knees then and there, and possibly would have done so, but for the presence of the old millionaire, who, with all his affability, had a certain coldness in his demeanor that brought the young man to a sense of the great distance between them, as he said:

"Ah, Ray, good-morning. How's the work at the factory? Well ahead, or you would not be here, I suppose?"

"It is well ahead, sir," returned Ray, in his coldest business tone. "I shall be ready to go out buying lumber by the middle of February, I trust."

"Ah, exactly. Used to buying?"

"I've done it, sir."

"Fancy woods?"

"Sometimes, sir, in a small way."

"Ah, yes. Small way. Well, we get it in a large way. Perhaps you might not do very well at first. I may go out myself this year. Besides, I shall want you here till this house is finished. I'm going to put on all the force I can hire, for I'm set on having it up before next Christmas."

John bowed and said nothing. He felt as if he would rather have the job hang on for ten years.

"Yes," pursued the senator, placidly, "I am happy to say things are going well with us all, and even my daughter is disposed to hurry the affair. Will you look over the plans and make any suggestions you think good? I want to have this the best house in America, and my daughter has confidence in your taste and judgment."

"I fear I can hardly claim to be an expert in such matters," returned the young man, coldly. "I was not bred an architect, and have not studied the luxuries of house arrangement."

"But you can tell us if our ornaments are in good taste," interposed Edith Wallis, with her charming smile. "Come here and sit down. I want to ask you what would be nice for the staircase. Here's the architect's design, and I don't like it at all. It's clumsy."

John, thus invited, had no resource but to obey, so he went and sat down by the young lady, who insisted on getting him to pronounce an opinion, and at last to sketch what he thought would be an improvement, to which she at once assented, saying:

"It shall be done. And that will make it necessary to alter the whole design of the hall carvings. Papa, what do you say to that?"

"I've left it all to you, my dear," the old man replied, rubbing his hands. "Spend all the money you want, as long as you don't waste time. How long will it take you to go over those drawings, Ray? There is more or less wood carving all over the house, and you'll have to superintend it all, and do the fine bits yourself."

John cast a hasty glance over them ere replying:

"I can give them a look before sunset, sir, but it will take a week to make the working drawings for the hall alone, if you want carving and not machine work."

"Decidedly no machine work," said the lady, interposing. "I'll have none of it. You must put your mind on everything, from stair rails to cabinets."

"In that case," said John, quietly, "it will be a long task, and not possible to be finished before Christmas, unless I have plenty of hands to do the rough work for me."

"You shall have anything you want," said the senator, eagerly. "You can take half the men in the shop. We are in no hurry there. This is the place for hurry. Take all you want, but that house must be finished by next Christmas. I've set my heart on having the wedding there."

John could not help a furtive glance at the young lady beside him, and saw a faint flush on her face, while she bit her lips and looked a little angry, at which he could not help feeling a spasm of the unreasonable joy that only a lover feels on such occasions.

"Very good, sir," he said, quietly. "Your orders shall be obeyed."

Then the old senator got up, and said, in a doubtful kind of way:

"I suppose, Edith, Ray would be able to work more conveniently at the factory than he could here. Give him your ideas, and he can work them up and report every morning."

"By no means," she retorted, pettishly. "I never can be sure of my ideas for five minutes together, unless I have some one to talk to who understands the business. I want Mr. Ray to stay and work here, as far as the drawing is concerned, so that I can make my suggestions on the spot."

The old millionaire took a turn up and down the room with a frown on his brow, and at last said:

"Very well, if you insist on it; but you must send for Mrs. Van Cott."

She tossed her little head.

"Certainly, if you wish it, sir."

"I do wish it decidedly," he retorted, rather sharply. "You ought to have more sense than to think of anything else."

So saying he rang the bell and told the waiter who entered:

"Tell Mrs. Van Cott to come here."

The waiter vanished, and very soon a prim old lady in a black silk dress and white widow's cap, with "housekeeper" imprinted on every line of her face and figure, came into the room and waited for orders.

The old gentleman took her aside and said something to her in a low tone, to which Mrs. Van Cott replied:

"Certainly, sir. Shall I bring my work?"

"Yes, ma'am, yes," returned the senator; "by all means, Mrs. Van Cott. I've got to go away now, or I'd stay myself. Very sorry to trouble you, ma'am, of course—"

"No trouble at all, senator."

And the old lady went away, very soon returning with a work-basket and a formidable pile of work, when she sat down by one of the windows and began to sew in a perfunctory kind of way, with her eyes everywhere but on her work, and particularly sharp on the figures of her young mistress and the handsome gentleman who was drawing at the table by the next window, after the senator had gone away.

As for John, he hardly knew what he was doing at first.

It is quite a hard thing to keep the attention on a task when the woman one worships is flitting about the table, every now and then leaning on your shoulder in an absent sort of way, to see what you are drawing, making the most distracting remarks, engaging you in arguments, pro and con, on every trivial point, and, as far as disturbance goes, rendering any concentration of thought impossible.

Such was the case with John Ray, as the hours wore on, and he had not yet finished a single drawing, though at the factory he could have done five in the same time.

True, he had had a good deal of erasing to do; for Miss Wallis seemed to be as capricious in her likes and dislikes in matters of art as she had been in her moods toward John up to that day. So had made him try a dozen different experiments on a single newel for the bottom of the staircase, without being able to decide on any one, and finally said to him, with a pretty pout:

"I cannot tell which I like best. You will have to make a drawing, in full, of each of these patterns, so that I can judge how it's going to look. I'm not mechanic enough to understand what you call a working drawing."

John smiled rather dubiously.

"I suppose you know it will take a week to make what you wish—full, perspective, shaded drawings of all those patterns."

"Well, suppose it does?" she asked, in a pettish way. "I suppose I'm competent to order it done, sir?"

"Certainly," returned John, in a lower tone: "but in that case—"

"Well, what?" she asked.

"That house will take ten years before it's finished, if everything is to be gone over in the same way."

She tossed her little head, and retorted:

"That's my affair. I give you the order, and I'm responsible, not you."

"Very well, madam," he replied, rising; "then I'd better take the sketches off and bring you back the drawings as soon as they're finished."

He had noticed Mrs. Van Cott watching him like a lynx, and felt that he must get away or he might commit some imprudence. He was rewarded for his suggestion by seeing the old lady smile complacently and nod, as much as to say:

"The best thing you can do, young man, and don't hurry to come back."

But Miss Wallis, the petted heiress, took a different view of the subject.

"I don't see why you need go," she pouted. "I'm sure this is ever so much pleasanter a place to work in than the bare attic in the factory. I've been there before, and it's the most comfortable place I ever was in—nothing but bare floors and a table."

"And solitude," returned John, gravely. "To tell the honest truth, it is impossible for me to do much work here, or anywhere else, unless I'm alone."

The young lady cast on him one of her peculiar, mysterious glances, and made no reply till she had looked at her watch. Then she said:

"Mrs. Van Cott, it's half-past twelve. Isn't it about time for lunch?"

"If you wish, Miss Wallis, I'll ring the bell," the housekeeper returned, rising.

"By no means. What I meant was this—Mr. Ray will take lunch with us."

The housekeeper pursed up her lips.

"Very well, Miss Wallis."

"Will you be good enough to give the proper orders, then?" pursued Edith, in a cold, distinct

voice. "They don't understand anything downstairs."

Mrs. Van Cott went to the bell, and had her hand on it, when the young lady asked, sharply:

"What are you going to do?"

"To ring for the cook, Miss Wallis, that I may give her the order," replied the widow, primly.

"I don't care to have the servants called in here," returned Edith, compressing her lips. "You seem to be slow at taking a hint, Mrs. Van Cott. I wish you to go yourself and order the lunch."

The widow, in her turn, compressed her thin lips, as she answered:

"You will please excuse me, Miss Wallis; but I had orders from your father not to leave this room till that young man was gone."

John Ray started from his seat as these very plain words were spoken, saying hurriedly:

"I beg your pardon; I'm sure I'll take the drawings away—"

"You'll do no such thing!" retorted Edith, who looked, for the first time since he had seen her, thoroughly angry. "You'll do no such thing, sir. Sit down there at once!"

Her tone was as haughty and imperious as if she had been a princess, and then she turned on the housekeeper, and went on in the same way:

"Do you refuse to leave this room?"

"Mr. Wallis gave orders that I should not," returned Mrs. Van Cott, looking a little frightened but resolute.

"I ask you, do you refuse to obey my orders?" asked Edith, sharply.

"No—not if you put it that way, Miss Wallis, but I entreat you—"

"Do as I order you, then. I take all the responsibility," cried the heiress, in tones of some excitement. "Go and see to the lunch as I bid you, and don't presume to criticise my actions."

The Widow Van Cott bowed stiffly, and swept from the room, while John, more confused than he had ever been before, went at his drawing with an energy that he had not hitherto shown, and Edith Wallis began to look as if she would have liked to have a good cry, had she dared to, for she sat down at the other side of the room, by the fire, her chest heaving stormily, patting her foot on the rug, and generally looking as if she was suffering from reaction.

And John realized that he was for the first time alone with the woman he loved, but under such circumstances that he dared not speak a word.

Presently she turned her head, just as he had withdrawn his eyes for a moment from his work, and her glance met his with a certain strange significance.

"Are you always as dull as you were yesterday?" she asked him.

John stared and dropped his pencil.

"Dull? In what?"

"In consenting to that site. Don't you see, I want you to help me put off the evil day as long as I can?"

John's voice trembled as he asked:

"What evil day, Miss Wallis?"

"The day that will never come—when I am to marry that man. Can't you see I hate him, or are you, like all the rest, leagued against me?"

"Leagued against you?" echoed the young man, incredulously. "I?"

"Yes, you. Why won't you help me? They are determined to make me marry that wretch, and I've been forced to consent on conditions. He has some hold on my father. I don't know what it is; but if you help me I can find out, and save myself. Why won't you help me, Mr. Ray?"

John took up his pencil and made dots on his paper to hide his great embarrassment, as he said, in a low tone:

"I would help you if I dared, but you don't seem to see that my motives are sure to be misconstrued."

"Misconstrued? how?" she asked, opening her brown eyes wide.

He made more dots than before as he answered slowly, but distinctly:

"They would say that I was a fortune-hunter, trying to take advantage of my position near you to—"

The color flamed up all over her face as she made him an imperative gesture for silence, saying, bitterly:

"Stop! stop! I understand now. Oh, how I wish I'd been born poor! You are right, and I was wrong. You cannot afford to help me. I am doomed, I suppose. Say no more. You are like all the rest of the world. You dare not help a woman for fear of others' opinions."

"You are wrong," he said, looking up at her more steadily. "I dare help you, and I will help you, but not in this way. It is myself I fear, not the world. If I were as rich as you, I would say what I dare not say now. But to say it would be—"

"What?"

He had paused, and she put the question in a wondering way.

"Dishonorable," he answered. "I wish I had never entered into this engagement with your

father. I felt that it was a mistake yesterday. To-day has satisfied me I was right in my feeling. Everything I do is liable to misconstruction; but I don't mind that so much—"

"And what is it you do mind?" asked the heiress, averting her face.

"What has just happened, misconstruction of your generosity by others. Your housekeeper was right, and you will have trouble about this interview, the first I ever held alone with you."

She tossed her head angrily.

"I take the risk of that. Besides, it is not the first. You saw me night before last, and no one said a word against it."

John had risen now, very pale, and the words seemed to be forced from him as he answered:

"That is true, but I was very near to making the greatest mistake of my life when your father came in."

"The greatest mistake of your life. What was that, sir?"

There was a certain mocking echo in her tone as she spoke, and he could not understand it.

"I was near forgetting the distance between us," he answered. "You know what I mean, Miss Wallis. Be merciful to me, for I feel that I am weak when I am near you. Don't force me to speak—"

"No, don't," said a sarcastic voice behind him, and there stood Percy, by the private door, which he had entered unseen.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

How Stephen Percy had come to be there was no mystery, for both Miss Wallis and the young carpenter had had their faces toward the folding doors at which they had expected Mrs. Van Cott, and their backs were turned to the side-door.

John Ray started as if an insect had stung him, and turned on his rival for one moment as if he were going to strike him, but the next he controlled himself at the thought of his own false position, and drew back to the other side of the table, while Percy continued, in the same bitterly sarcastic tone:

"No, don't force him to speak, Miss Wallis. He does not want to, of course! He is not trying to inveigle an heiress, of course! Don't force him to own that he is a traitor as well as a fortune-hunter."

John, in all his own emotion, could not help noticing the marvelous calm of Edith Wallis.

She had not so much as turned her head or started at the sound of Percy's voice, but sat with one tiny slippers foot on the brass fender-rail, gazing in at the blazing wood fire as if she had not heard a word of the bitter address.

When Percy had ended, she turned her head to look at him, inquiring scornfully:

"Well, have you done?"

"No," returned the young man, pale with jealous rage, "not till that scoundrel is turned out of the house. I'll—"

In a moment she had started up, her eyes gleaming, asking:

"You'll do what? Do you know whose house this is? I give orders here, not you, sir."

Her sudden flare-up seemed to take him aback; but he cried indignantly:

"I wonder you're not ashamed to look me in the face. Didn't you engage yourself to me? and here I find you—"

"Giving you an excuse to break off, if you please, sir," she retorted, with an accent of ineffable scorn. "You're at liberty to do it now. You know well enough that I hate you."

"Yes, I know it," he answered, bitterly. "I do you the justice to say you never hid it. But I won't give you up. Do you hear me? I won't give you up. I'll marry you and I'll break your spirit then, if not before. As for this fellow—"

He turned on John fiercely.

"Why don't you go, sir? You know you're not wanted here. This lady is engaged to me, and your presence is an intrusion."

"Mr. Ray's presence is not an intrusion. He came here by my father's invitation, and I have asked him to stay to lunch," the heiress broke in, boldly. "If you have any more absurdities to utter, Mr. Percy, I'll leave the room till your temper cools down, and if you utter any more rudeness I shall appeal to Mr. Ray for protection."

"To Mr. Ray!" hissed Percy, white to the lips, and foaming with hate. "Ay, ay, you'd better, confound your—"

The words were not finished; for at that moment John Ray, who had been growing more and more excited, suddenly stepped forward between the two people, and holding his finger close to Percy's face, said:

"Take care, sir. Anything to me; but remember that lady must be held sacred from insult."

His motion was not specially menacing, but, innocent as he looked, he was ready to strike, and Percy knew it from the gleam of his eye.

"Insult her!" he echoed, sullenly. "I don't want to insult her. I'm only telling the truth."

I've a right to complain of her conduct, and you've no right to interfere. Keep away from me, sir. I don't propose to fight you. I fight with my equals. Here, I'll soon dispose of you."

And he turned his back on John and strode toward the bell-cord, when Edith Wallis said to Ray, quietly:

"Stop him! This has gone far enough."

John never hesitated an instant as soon as he heard her voice.

Before Stephen could reach the bell, his rival's hand was upon his collar, and he was wrenched back and run into a corner, where John said sternly:

"Now, that's enough. The lady wants you to stop, and I'm going to stop you."

Stephen Percy had never been taken hold of in all his life before, in such a summary manner. In his self-conceit and arrogance he had been used to seeing every one bow down to him, and he was as soft as an infant physically, while John was a powerful young man, used to active work. Ray's grip was like a vise, and Stephen faltered and sunk into a chair, looking up amazedly into his rival's face, completely cowed.

Then John turned to Miss Wallis:

"I deeply regret, madam," he said, "that I should have been an innocent cause of quarrel here; and there is but one amends I can make. I resign my place in the company, and you must find some one else to do your carving work."

Then he turned on Percy:

"As for you, sir, I can make great allowances for you now, for you have cause for anger; but I entreat you not to visit it on that lady. I was weak enough to think that I could control my own heart, but I assure you, on my word of honor as a man, that I have never said one word to Miss Wallis that you might not have heard. Whether, in my excitement, I might not have said more, when you interrupted us, I do not know; but there shall be no sort of mistake now."

So saying, he turned back again to Edith Wallis, who was gazing at him in a way that, even now, he could not understand fully, and went on:

"Miss Wallis, farewell. I apologize to you for ever entering this house. I had no right ever to have done it, because I am a poor man; you are an heiress. Yet I have dared to love you."

She started slightly for the first time, and a flush and smile crossed her face.

"Yes," he pursued, "I would not have said it had you not openly told this gentleman you hated him. Any man who tries to force a woman's affections against her will is a— Well, I don't want to use harsh words, but I would not do it. Miss Wallis, I love you, and I give you fair notice that when I have gained a fortune equal to yours, I shall take a public opportunity to tell you so again, and try to win your love in return, holding, as I do, that wealth is an accident, and that one man is as good as another. Now, farewell. You are not afraid to be left alone with this gentleman, are you?"

Edith smiled; such a smile!

"Afraid? of him?"

The longest diatribe could not have conveyed a tithe of her scorn, and Percy winced under it as he sat in the corner, not daring to rise.

"Then farewell," John repeated, and he went to the door, when she said, in a clear, distinct voice:

"Stop one moment, please. I, too, have something to say."

He paused at the door, and she continued:

"I thank you for your frankness, and I will be equally frank. Nothing can ever make me marry that man in the corner; and since you will not come here any more in the capacity you have been filling, I invite you to come as a friend, whenever you feel inclined so to do. Good-day, Mr. Ray."

She swept him a courtesy like a queen, and then stared over at the humiliated Percy, who muttered:

"Very well, very well. We'll see."

But John listened no more. The scene was reaching an anti-climax, and he felt that a longer stay would make them both ridiculous, so he bowed himself out and left the house.

He went straight down to the offices of the company, and found the president at his desk, a board-meeting in full blast, with the directors round the table full of papers and details. The old senator saw him enter the room and sit down, but did not notice him; the business on hand, at the precise moment that John entered, being the approval of Ray's salary as carver, as he found out soon after his entrance.

More than one of the members seemed to think it was too high, and called on the president for explanations, to which he replied that he considered the services of the new man cheap at double the money, as it had been proved by experience that the more artistic and beautiful cars the company put on the track, the more custom was attracted; and it was well known to the board that the Emerald Company was running them hard on their own roads, and like-

ly to beat them, unless they could put on a better class of vehicles, with more luxurious accommodations.

So the resolution was passed approving of John's engagement, and, very soon after, the board adjourned, when old Wallis beckoned up John, saying, with a contented chuckle, as the young man sat down by him:

"Well, you see I put it through. You need not have been anxious. I told you that I ran this board to suit myself."

"I was not anxious," returned John, beginning to feel rather embarrassed now that he had to speak out. "But the fact is, sir, I wanted to speak to you."

"What about, what about?" asked the senator, hurriedly. "Anything wrong about the plans of the house? Suit yourself. I told you that you should have all the help you wanted."

"No, sir, not about that. The more I see of them, the more I am satisfied that they should be followed as drawn. The fact is, it is throwing away money to employ me there at all."

"No, it isn't; no, it isn't. Don't you see that, if the company don't mind, it's no one else's business? Your time's paid for."

"That's not the question, sir. The fact is that I have resolved to resign my position at once. It does not suit me."

"Resign?" echoed the senator, aghast. "Are you crazy? You won't get such a chance again in a month of Sundays. You're being paid enough to satisfy any man."

"That's not the trouble, sir. As far as the company's work is concerned, I am more than satisfied."

"Then what's the matter? Is it the house-work? Too many bosses—is that it? Oh, you mustn't mind that. Look here. Why not do your work at the factory, and I'll send over the drawings?"

"Because, sir," and John drew a long breath, "there has been trouble to-day at your house. Mr. Percy came there; we had a scene, and the end of it is that I have made up my mind to resign."

The old senator compressed his lips.

"A scene, eh? More of his confounded jealousy about nothing, I suppose. I don't mind that. We'll manage to get him cooled down. Leave him to me."

"Unfortunately, sir," said John turning graver and graver, "it is impossible. The gentleman has cause for jealousy."

The senator stared at him.

"Cause! What do you mean? Confound your impudence! You don't mean to say you've given him cause?"

He grew redder in the face as he spoke, and looked so angry and contemptuous that John was nettled to say:

"Impudence or not, sir, I have done it. I told Miss Wallis, this morning, in the presence of Mr. Percy, that I loved her, and intended, as soon as my fortune was equal to hers, to win her away from the man she hates."

The senator pushed back his chair and glared at John with such fury that the young man began to be afraid the old one would break a blood-vessel.

"You—told—my—daughter—that?" he growled, in a voice like setting a saw.

"I did, sir, and I repeat the same to you, that there may be no further mistake as to our future relations," said John, calmly. "You were once what I am now, a carpenter. I can rise as high as you, and I intend to do it."

The old senator's deep flush gradually faded away to pink, the muscles of his face relaxed, and he said very dryly:

"When you've done it, there will be time to talk about it. In the mean time, I accept your resignation. How many days have you been in our service?"

"So few that I don't care to be paid for them, senator," returned John, proudly. "All I ask is the return of my copy of the contract, and here is yours."

"Certainly. I don't want to hold you to it now, Ray. You're an honest man to come and give it up under the circumstances, and I'm ready to help you anywhere you wish. Refer to me, wherever you go, and I trust to you not to reveal the cause of our parting."

"You need have no fear of that, sir. Thank you for your kindness, and good-day."

CHAPTER XVI.

CHANGING BASE.

JOHN RAY went straight from the Diamond Car Company's offices to see his friend O'Rourke, and found that the lawyer was away at court.

He had been looking for advice as to his future, and felt a little disappointed, but took his way home to his boarding-house, where he found two letters on his table. One was postmarked that day from the city itself; the other, three days old, from the East. Naturally he opened the Eastern letter first, and found in it, to his extreme surprise, the printed heading of the Emerald Car Company, and a letter from the president, offering him the very terms of which Senator Wallis had told him two days before as having been offered and asking him to telegraph a reply "yes" or "no" at once.

The handwriting was very different from that

of the Palmer House note, and he was more puzzled than ever as to the origin of that mysterious epistle.

Opening his city letter, he found in it the following lines:

Go to the Emerald company and make your fortune. There is a traitor in their employment who is in the pay of the Diamond company. He telegraphed your offer to them; but you have a friend in Chicago who will enable you to do what you wish, if you will follow that friend's advice, and not throw away any more chances."

There was no signature, but the handwriting was the same with that of the Palmer House note—evidently a disguised one, with the letters sloping back instead of forward.

John looked at both letters in a kind of stupor. It seemed as if fortune were thrown into his hands whichever way he turned, and, if he had an enemy in Stephen Percy, he had certainly, also, a powerful unknown friend, who seemed to have served him well so far.

He lost no time in going to the telegraph office and sending back word that the offer was accepted and that he would start by an early train; then he went to O'Rourke's office, told him what had transpired from beginning to end, receiving the dry assurance:

"Ye've better luck than ye deserve. Ye ought to have known better than to let the young lady draw ye into plain talk. Couldn't ye see when she sent the old woman away, she did it to draw ye on? Girls are all alike. She's taken with ye; that's all; and ye can never marry her; for a man can't afford to live on his wife's money in these days, though a good many do, bad luck to them."

"Then do you really think," asked John, in a trembling voice, "that she does not dislike me for daring to speak?"

O'Rourke grinned.

"Ye're a carpenter, and I'm a lawyer. Ye look at words; I look at faces and try to read them. I think the lady's a spoiled heiress, and there's no accounting for their vagaries. She hates the other fellow and thinks she likes you; but time will tell which has made the mistake. Meantime, the quicker ye go out of Chicago, the better. I know the Percy family, and they're not likely to let ye go long without paying ye a visit, just for compliment."

"What do you mean?" asked John, in a tone of wonder.

O'Rourke lowered his voice.

"I mean that the young man has great power even though we are in the land of the free. Don't stay out late at nights in Chicago, unless ye carry a pistol. It's not the most pious of cities; and a rival, more or less, out of the way, doesn't cost over fifty dollars. Get your ticket and pack up as soon as the Lord will let ye."

John rather scouted the idea at first, but it was recalled to him as he left the office, by seeing two rough-looking men hanging around the doorway.

One of them shambled off down the street in one direction as he went out, the other in the opposite, neither seeming to notice him, but, as he suddenly wheeled round after a few steps, he saw that the man behind him had stopped and was gazing after him, while the other one ahead stopped also the moment he paused, and looked back.

And it was four o'clock on a winter day and growing dark.

John saw in a moment that he was being followed, and O'Rourke's advice to carry a pistol seemed so good to him that he set off for the nearest arms store at once and purchased a new revolver and some cartridges, loading the weapon before he left the store.

When he got outside and looked up and down the street, both men had gone, and he pursued his way quietly toward his boarding-house, at the door of which he suddenly wheeled again, and saw the two slouching figures down the street, some distance off, coming slowly on.

As soon as they saw him stop, the watchers stopped too, and John went into the house, convinced that O'Rourke was right and that Percy had set watchers on him, for some purpose unknown.

He set to work and packed up his effects in his trunk, preparatory to his journey, with the intention of taking the ten o'clock Eastern Express; and, when he had got through, it occurred to him to look out of the window, after turning off the gas.

There, right opposite the house, and looking up, were the two slouching men, and he felt a thrill of anger as he thought of the man who had sent them.

He went quietly out of the house by the back way, climbed over the fence into a vacant lot, came round the block, and suddenly pounced on one of the men, asking him sternly:

"Why are you watching that house, you scoundrel? Clear out, or I'll have you put where you'll spy no more."

The man seemed taken aback by the sudden onset from one he thought to be in the house, and faltered:

"I ain't doin' nothin' to nobody, I ain't. What's the matter with you?"

And then John recognized in the coarse, sensual face and dirty, ragged clothes, a man he

had not seen for a long time, Red Mike, once of the Tramps' Camp.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, audibly cocking the pistol in his overcoat pocket. "You want to earn railroad money, do you, after trying to throw trains off the tracks all the summer? Who's paying you to follow me?"

He kept a keen watch on the other man, and saw him sneaking away, as if he had no sort of connection with Red Mike, so he went on:

"How dare you watch me? Answer."

"There ain't no crime in watchin'," growled Mike, sullenly.

"There is, when you're the watcher. Get out of this, or I'll put a hole through you."

Mike slouched off, growling:

"You're too blamed smart, you are. You'll get into a hole some day. Others kin shoot as well as you."

But for all menaces he went off, and John followed him keeping his hand on his pistol, till he saw him into a well-lighted street, when our hero called a hack and went back to his lodgings, where he took leave of his landlady and drove off to the train.

Twenty minutes later he was in a new sleeping-car, made by the very company to which he was now going, whirling away from Chicago at forty miles an hour, Red Mike and all the rest being forgotten.

He seemed to breathe more freely as the train whirled away, for there is something in the sensation of being watched by a rich enemy, who can command the services of many people, that is trying to the nerves of the bravest man, even when he knows that the chief of his foes is a coward.

Perhaps it was for that very reason that John Ray had felt so nervous, after his warning from O'Rourke and the discovery of the tramps following him. He remembered that Percy was a coward, and that he, John, had humiliated the young man before a lady in a manner he had not dared to resent at the time. He remembered also that Percy was the master of riches, and that his father was the president of the very road he was now riding on, with almost unlimited power over the destinies of hundreds of human beings, himself among the number.

He began to feel superstitious; to imagine that the train was about to meet with an accident; that he might be robbed or hurt on his way, if ever he got to his destination alive.

He slept very little the first night, and it was not till he had crossed the State of Ohio and approached New York that he began to feel easy.

However, trains go on, without regard to the ideas of their passengers, and, early in the gray dawn of a winter's day, John Ray found himself opposite the great city of New York, entering it, as he had entered Chicago a year before, all alone, but under very different auspices.

Then he had been nearly penniless, now he had three thousand-dollar bills hid away inside his vest, the savings of months, with plenty of money besides to carry him on till he earned more.

He took the first train out of the city for the Emerald Car Works, which were far away in Western New York, and was surprised, when he got to the place, to find a beautiful country village, in the midst of a smiling landscape overflowing with riches, while Mr. August Schmidt, the chief of the works, was a pondrous and smiling gentleman of German extraction, who seemed to be not only well satisfied with himself and all the world, though his stock was not yet at par, but willing to please every one he met, and to treat those poorer than himself as if they were his equals in the scale.

John found him in a handsome office, in a factory surrounded by pretty cottages in the valley of a beautiful river, and was greeted kindly before he could speak his name, instead of being scowled at as he had been in Chicago, wherever he went among strangers.

As soon as he mentioned his name, however, the good-natured face of the chief became grave, and he said, rather coldly:

"Mr. Ray, I must confess, since I wrote to you, that I have heard bad news of you from Chicago."

"Indeed?"

And Jas-er began to understand what O'Rourke had meant when he told him that the Percy family were not likely to let him alone long.

"And what was the bad news?" he asked.

"That you were in the employ of the Diamond Car Company, and had been dismissed."

"For what, Mr. Schmidt?"

"I don't know that I ought to say. Do you know the secretary of that company?"

"Mr. Stephen Percy? Yes."

"He sent the telegram yesterday."

"Can I see it, sir?"

"No; it was addressed to me privately."

"Can I learn the nature of the charge, sir? It is evident that it has caused a prejudice against me in your mind. Remember that I came in response to your letter, made with a distinct offer."

Mr. Schmidt looked awkward.

"Yes. I am aware that you can hold us to our contract if you wish—"

"I mean no such thing, sir. If you wish to repudiate it, you can. I am not in need of employment. I can make my living by private work when I wish. I mean this. What is the cause assigned for my dismissal in Mr. Percy's telegram?"

Schmidt hesitated and looked at him narrowly till he said:

"Your face looks honest. I think I'll tell you. The accusation is, *peculation*."

"Indeed?"

Jasper felt a thrill of indignation, not unmixed with fear, as he, for the second time, experienced the malignant persecution of his powerful foe.

"Mr. Schmidt," he said, "there is something strange in all this. I was not dismissed from the service of the Diamond Car Company. I did not enter it till three or four days ago, and only worked in it for two more days. I was doing private work in Chicago when Senator Wallis sent for me and engaged me in his company, because he knew that you were about to make me the offer you did."

"But that is impossible," returned the president of the Emerald Company, in a mild way. "How could he know it, when it was made in a private letter, of which no one knew save the clerk who copied it?"

"Nevertheless, sir, Senator Wallis gave me the terms which you offered three days before your letter arrived."

Mr. Schmidt looked graver than before.

"Mr. Ray," he said, "you do not seem to be aware that you are making a serious accusation against my clerks. If my offer was known in Chicago three days before the letter arrived, it must have been telegraphed from here by some one in my employ."

"To show you that it was, sir, here is my copy of my contract with Mr. Wallis. You will see that it contains the same terms as yours, even to the option of taking stock for pay, and the date will show you when it was made."

Schmidt looked over the contract very carefully, and at last said:

"It seems to be true. So far you have proved your case. But you must understand that an accusation of dishonesty is different from anything else. You may be the best carver in the world, but if I could not trust you, of what use would you be to me?"

"That is true," replied John, quietly; "but there is a mistake in that. I resigned my place, and was not dismissed at all."

"And why did you resign?" asked Schmidt. "This was a better offer than mine on the face of it, for Diamond Car stock is worth more than ours. Why did you leave the company?"

John hesitated.

He did not want to tell the truth, and he would not lie. He had promised the senator not to reveal anything.

At last he said slowly:

"I resigned on a question of feeling, sir, in connection with private business outside of the company. What it was I prefer that you should ask Mr. Wallis. I am willing to abide by the result of his answer, and in the mean time to waive any contract in your letter. If you please, telegraph to him at once, and ask him why I left the company's service."

"I will do so at once," said Schmidt, in a tone of eager satisfaction.

Then he called out to some one in the next room:

"Mr. Stover, telegraph at once to Chicago to Senator Septimus Wallis:

"Why did John Ray leave your service? Answer at once."

AUGUST SCHMIDT.

John heard the rapid tick of the little instrument and presently a thin, dried-up young man, with small eyes, looked into the room and said:

"Message has gone, sir."

"Very good," was the answer. "Now, Mr. Ray, if you would like to read the paper till the answer comes, I shall take it as a favor."

And then all was silent in the office save the scratch of Schmidt's pen, as he wrote off letter after letter, till the tinkle of a bell in the next room made him look up and say:

"There comes the answer. Our message must have caught him at home."

Then John listened to the ticking of the registering instrument in the next room, and wished he understood what the sounds meant, till the thin, small-eyed young man looked in again, saying:

"Here's the answer, sir."

Mr. Schmidt looked over it, and John watched his face, but could read nothing in it, till the president of the Emerald Car Company handed the paper over to him with the remark in a dry tone:

"That does not tell much, one way or the other. Look at it."

John looked at it.

AUGUST SCHMIDT, Smithville, N.Y.:—
"John Ray left us, because he did not know enough to keep his place." S. WALLIS.

"That may mean that you are not as good a carver as you are represented," Mr. Schmidt

observed, dryly. "Can you explain it, Mr. Ray?"

"I could if I would," returned John; "but I don't care to. As to the question whether I am a good carver or not, time will tell. In the mean time, do you want me, or don't you?"

"If you are the John Ray that carved Mr. O'Rourke's mantle-piece, of which I have seen a photograph, I do," said Schmidt.

"I am the same man."

"Then here is your contract, ready to sign, for a week on trial. If you are the true John Ray, I'll give you anything you want; but I have to be cautious, for you are a stranger."

John drew himself up proudly.

"I have done enough on trial. Either you want me or you don't. Which is it? I am indifferent to the result. I should not have come here if you had not sent for me."

He was beginning to see that this jolly, good-natured looking Schmidt was as keen at a bargain as old Wallis; and that the old senator had telegraphed as he did, on purpose to prevent the rival company securing him, without actually telling a falsehood about him.

"Come, Mr. Schmidt," he said, rising; "here is your letter, making me a distinct offer, and the contract showing that I am the true John Ray. Do you want me, or shall I go to New York?"

Schmidt hesitated.

"You see, if it had not been for Mr. Percy's telegram and Wallis's equivocal answer to mine, I should have said yes, but—"

"But now you decline?"

"No, no. I've not said decline yet."

"Then do you intend to put me off? I am ready to go to work at once."

"Tingle! tingle!" went the bell in the next room, and the President of the Emerald Company started and listened to the tick of the instrument, saying hastily:

"Hold on a moment. There's another telegram, and it may be about you."

"I wait for no such nonsense," cried the young man, indignantly. "I'm going to the station now, to take the next train for New York City. If I reach there alive, I commence a suit against you for damages. Good-morning."

And so saying, he walked angrily out of the office and away from the building, toward the railroad station, and had gone nearly half a mile, when he heard a voice behind him in the distance, calling faintly:

"Halloo! Halloo!"

Glancing back over his shoulder, there was the thin, fox-eyed young man, at a jog-trot, waving his arms, panting for breath, and trying to overtake him.

John halted to let him come up, and the small-eyed young man panted out:

"Please come back—all—a mistake—got—tele—gram—Chicago—all right."

"What do you mean?" asked John, stiffly. "I don't want to be humbugged any more by any of you. What's the telegram? Who sent it? What's it about?"

The fox-eyed clerk could hardly speak, but managed to say:

"Old man—tell you—Schmidt—I dassn't."

And then John went slowly and rather unwillingly back to the office, where Mr. Schmidt met him, overflowing with smiles, saying:

"You are too hasty for business. I have to be careful, you know, because my money is not all my own, but borrowed. I have received another telegram that alters your case. I know now why you left Chicago, and it does not affect the business. I am ready to put you to work at once."

"And from whom is the telegram?" asked John, wonderingly.

"From a lady," was the smiling reply, "and one who seems to be a great friend of yours. Senator Wallis's daughter."

And John recognized that Edith had saved him once more.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEWS FROM THE WEST.

Two years had passed from the time when John Ray left Chicago to enter the Emerald Car Company, when the Chicago papers contained, among the deaths, the following:

"On Friday, the 16th inst., at six forty-two, p. m., the Hon. Pompey S. Percy, in the seventy-eighth year of his age, of paralysis. Funeral at his late residence, in this city, on Sunday, 18th inst., at 2 p. m."

Two months later a New York paper contained in its Western correspondence, the following item of gossip:

"It is understood that the youthful millionaire, Stephen Percy, will shortly lead to the altar the beautiful daughter of Senator Wallis, the gentleman who resigned the presidency of the Diamond Car Company last year in Mr. Percy's favor. Miss Wallis was known on her trip to Europe, as 'The American Lily,' and there were rumors that more than one noble duke in England sighed after her in vain. The engagement between Mr. Percy and Miss Wallis is understood to be of long standing; and the completion of the marriage has been delayed till the magnificent house, that has been so long the wonder of this city during its erection, be finished. We understand that it will be ready for occupation some time in May, when the wedding is expected to take

place, the happy couple receiving the new house as a wedding present. It is computed to have cost more than a million of dollars, and will be the finest of its kind in this State."

This paragraph went the rounds of the papers, and at last fell under the eye of President Schmidt, of the Emerald Car Company, who smiled when he read it, and called to the foxy-faced young man who did the private telegraphing for the company.

"Stover," said he, "when did you last hear from Mr. Ray?"

"Yesterday night, sir."

"Where was he?"

"Coming home, sir, from the South. Said he'd be here to day by noon."

And Stover glanced at the paper in the hands of his chief out of the corner of his foxy little eyes, as much as to say:

"What set you thinking about him?"

But the president had forgotten all about Stover, and threw down the paper on the table, while he began to write a letter, and the operator returned to his room, picked up a copy of the same paper, and began to search through the page that Schmidt had been reading, till he lighted on the paragraph that had caused his chief to think of Ray.

Then the foxy-faced young man smiled also, and muttered to himself:

"Oho, so it's arranged at last! I must keep Ray from seeing this."

Presently Schmidt went out on some private business, and the foxy-faced young man immediately went to his instrument and began to work.

It took him some time to get himself in line with the station he wanted, and then he telegraphed:

"Stock two hundred and twenty-seven, Ray coming home. What shall I do?" STOVER."

He waited for a little while, glancing nervously at the window, beyond which he expected to see the form of Schmidt coming back, and presently a bell rung and the instrument began to tick.

Stover listened intently, for the message seemed to interest him greatly, and the ticking went on for some time, till it stopped, and a bell rung again.

Then he drew a long sigh of relief and turned round in his chair to confront no less a person than John Ray, with a traveling-bag in his hand, standing at the door of the office, looking down at him with a smile, and saying:

"Why, Stover, what's the matter? Who's talking to you now?"

Stover had turned unusually pale, and then red again at the surprise, but said:

"Why, Mr. Ray, how did you come back so soon and quietly? I didn't expect you till the next train."

John laid down his bag.

"Indeed? Well, I took an early one, that's all. Whom were you talking to?"

"Oh, only Poole and Blather, of Cincinnati, about some varnishes," responded Stover, hastily.

"A mere nothing."

"Where's the message, then?" asked John. "Write it out for me. I want to hear from those very people."

"I'd better put you on them at once, hadn't I, Mr. Ray?" asked Stover, obsequiously. "It's no trouble at all, I assure you."

John frowned slightly, and sat down in the president's chair.

"No. I want you to write out that same message they just sent you. I heard the last part, and I didn't hear one word about varnish."

Stover started violently.

"What! Did you hear—that is—do you understand telegraphing?"

"I understand a good many things," was the dry reply, "It pays me to learn them. Now own up, who was talking to you, or I'll know the reason why."

"Poole and Blather," returned Stover, earnestly. "Indeed, it was; and you've nearly driven the words out of my head. I'll write it out."

John watched him as he wrote, and took the paper, which he read and tore up into small pieces.

"You're lying to me, Stover," he said. "You were getting a message from Chicago, from Stephen Percy. I heard the last words, and they were, 'Keep him away at any hazard. Percy.' You're the man who has been betraying us to the Diamond Car Company all these years. Now own up, or I'll see you dismissed with disgrace, if not locked in jail, before night."

Stover trembled violently.

He was not a villain; only a rather weak and cunning young man, who had been unable to withstand the temptation of heavy bribes from the opposite company, and who had been quietly giving away everything he knew by means of the telegraph, without fear of detection, thanks to the easy, unsuspicious nature of Mr. Schmidt, who frequently left him alone in the office for an hour at a time while he was absent.

"Yes," continued John, watching him, "you didn't know that I had been learning to telegraph on purpose to find you out. Did you?"

Stover was too frightened to answer. He had been the confidential clerk so long that Schmidt had ceased to watch him, and John Ray, since he came to the Emerald Company's Works, had devoted himself so much to his special line of business that he had seldom visited the office. Yet he had suspected Stover from the first day he entered the works, and had been watching his opportunity to trap him in some way.

"Now, Stover," he said, quietly, "write out that message in full, or I'll write it for you. I heard more than you think, and you know whether I gave you the last words correctly."

Stover looked haggardly at John, and faltered:

"Don't expose me, sir. It's the first time I ever did it—"

"Don't lie to me," interrupted John, sternly. "You telegraphed to Wallis and Percy two years ago with the offer Mr. Schmidt made me, and you've been doing it ever since, telling them all the news that you thought would be of service to them. You didn't think there was some one at the other end of the line equally interested in my behalf. Now write that message out, or I'll have you discharged. Quick!"

Stover sat down and wrote out the following message:

"Ray must not come to Chicago on any terms. We are all in trouble just now on account of bad speculations, but your money is safe enough. I send orders for five hundred extra to be paid you at your bank. If we beat you shall be the new secretary; but a good deal depends on keeping Schmidt in the dark, and if Ray comes here it will get out. Keep him away at any hazard. PERCY."

John took the telegram and folded it into his pocket, saying:

"Very well. Now I understand what you've been doing well enough. The next thing is, what did you say to him to bring out this answer?"

Stover wrote out his own message, and John observed:

"Stock two-twenty-seven" that means ours. "Ray coming home": why did you say that?"

Stover hesitated.

"I don't exactly know, sir."

"You do. Answer at once, or it will be the worse for you."

And at this moment the form of Mr. Schmidt could be seen approaching the office-window, so that Stover faltered out:

"Don't tell him, for God's sake. I'll make a clean breast of it, Mr. Ray, if you'll only spare me."

"Very well," said John, in a low tone. "I'll give you one chance. Meet me at my rooms tonight and tell me all, and I'll put you in a way to redeem yourself."

"I'll do it," cried Stover, earnestly. "I'll be there at eight, Mr. Ray."

"See that you do," was the reply, and at that moment the president of the Emerald Car Company entered the office crying:

"Why, Ray, my boy, I thought you would not be here before noon."

CHAPTER XVIII.

EDITH'S PROMISE.

SENATOR SEPTIMUS WALLIS just re-elected for a second term, nevertheless looked the reverse of cheerful as he sat in his library in Chicago, with Stephen Percy opposite to him.

The younger man had the usual smile of supercilious self-satisfaction on his face, and was twisting his mustache to curl upward, an occupation in which he passed much of his time.

"Well, senator," he said, tipping back his chair and looking at his senior through half-closed eyes, "that's just how the matter stands. I have waited as long as I intend to wait, and now the question is, what are you going to do?"

The senator, for a man of his quiet, self-reliant temperament, seemed to be strangely disturbed in his mind.

"I don't know what I can do, Stephen. I asked her only yesterday, and she positively refused."

"Then how am I going to get my money back?" asked Percy. "You know I've kept the concern running against losses for a full year now, ever since that confounded Emerald Company began to underbid and run us out. I don't know how they've managed to do it, but they have."

"I know," replied Wallis, rather shortly.

"Oh, yes, of course you know. You mean it all came of letting that fellow Ray go to the other company," said Percy.

"That's just what I mean," retorted Wallis.

"And I say it has nothing to do with it in any way."

"I could prove it to you if I chose."

"I'd like to hear you."

"Very well, then: in the first place he was the only man we had in our employment who had ideas and knew how to execute them."

Percy sneered bitterly.

"You always thought him a paragon, I know. Haven't I ideas too?"

"Not practical ones. You were not trained as he was."

"What of that? Haven't I done as well as any of your mechanics? I've put the handsomest cars to be seen on any road into the field."

"Yes, and not one has made money."

"Why not?"

"Because they cost too much. You're not a practical man."

Percy colored slightly. The senator's plain speaking nettled him.

"I'm a practical man enough when it comes to drawing checks," he retorted. "Where would your company have been years ago, if I hadn't made advances?"

"Where it ought to have been, in process of liquidation," answered the senator, in a dogged sort of way. "I've never denied it to you, and if it were all to be done over again, I'd have commenced at the place where I'm likely to end now."

Percy made an impatient movement.

"I don't see why," he said. "I've told you I'm willing to let the whole thing go, on condition that Edith marries me."

"And that's just what she won't do, as long as she doesn't know the truth of the matter. She imagines I'm as rich as ever, and can't see why I'm set on this match. You know she hates you—"

"Yes; you need not enlarge on that," returned Percy, irritably. "It's not so very flattering that it need be dinned into my ears all the time."

"But you won't realize my difficulty," the senator returned, just as irritably. "You want me to drive her into having you, whether she likes you or not, and I've already told you I can't do it."

"Why not?" persisted Percy. "The money is yours, and so is the house."

"How do you know that?" asked the senator, gloomily.

Percy looked surprised.

"How do I know it? Why, of course, it's so, isn't it? You paid all the bills."

"I did, with her money as far as it went."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that years ago, before I began to speculate in those accursed stocks, into which your father led me, like a fool as I was, I set aside half my property for her benefit, and that has all gone into the house, which is covered now with mechanics' liens."

Percy stared at him as he spoke, as if not understanding him, and after a long pause asked:

"Then do you mean to say that you have absolutely no property left?"

"None but this house, and what stock remains in my name. You're welcome to that. I can begin the world again, if it be necessary, for I've not forgotten how to shove a plane yet."

Percy broke into a sneering laugh.

"Yes, you'd look nice at that. Don't talk nonsense. You've something behind all this, now you're into politics for another six years. You must remember you owe me that, too; for, if I hadn't come down freely you'd never have got through with the Legislature."

"I'm aware of that. I know I owe you money, and that I can't repay it," was the answer of the old man, while his face wore a worried look. "I don't deny anything Percy; but what can I do? She firmly declares she won't marry you till she pleases, and I can't make her."

"Then what are you going to do? I don't propose to be made a cat's-paw, you understand. I'm very fond of the girl or I wouldn't have stood all I have from her—"

"I know that, Stephen. You've shown us both great kindness."

"Then again I ask, what are you going to do for me?"

"What can I do?"

"That's not my business. I know very well what I shall do."

"And what is that?"

"Expose and sell you out. People will have a nice time, after you've been spending all this money on the new house, to learn that you're a beggar. The papers will be full of it, and if you don't have to come down from your high horse, it won't be my fault."

And Percy rose from his seat, with his eyes flashing, as he continued:

"This has gone on long enough. You've bled me for months and months in the hope that all would come right at last, and that Edith would keep her word. She put me off till the house was finished, and I was patient. You thought a trip to Europe might wean her of her fancies, and I let you go. Didn't I?"

"Yes, you did; and while we were gone, you nearly run the company into bankruptcy," returned the senator, with some sharpness. "That's been the cause of the whole trouble. You were satisfied that you could run the machine, and I let you do it while I was away. What's been the consequence? Our stock, that was at a hundred and fifty when I left, is now down at thirty-five, and—"

"Yes," interrupted Percy, triumphantly, "and I've bought it all in, too. What do I care what it's quoted at? I own it all except your lot. We control the market."

"Much good that will do me when the contracts come in. I tell you, it will swamp me."

"Unless you can realize in the mean time,"

remarked Percy. "You forget that, if I've run the concern into debt, I'm not a beggar by any means."

"That won't do me any good," returned the senator, rather mournfully.

"It will, if you know what to do. See here, Wallis. Why don't you exercise your authority in the matter? Edith will obey you if you insist on it."

"She might; but I can't do it."

"And why not?"

"Because she's my daughter, sir. Because I feel that I have wronged her enough by being led into trouble as I have been, and because I won't go on any further to make her unhappy."

Percy frowned impatiently.

"Unhappy? Why should she be that? I offer to make her the richest woman in Chicago, and—"

At this moment they heard the sound of the hall bell, and the senator, with a look of alarm, jumped up and went to the window, exclaiming:

"Hush, for heaven's sake! She's coming in now. There's the carriage."

"So much the better," said Percy, in a satisfied way. "I told you I could wait no longer. Now let matters come to a head. I have given you my terms. Refuse them, and I go straight to my lawyer. I'll be fooled no longer."

The senator made no answer, for he heard steps in the hall, and knew that his daughter was coming in from a shopping expedition; and he felt in that nervous state in which he had been for some months past, since he had known that he was ruined, as far as a man of his wealth could be, who was certain to have more than what most men would call a competence left to him.

Percy, having said his say, sat down in an easy-chair, and waited the arrival of the young lady, who presently came into the room, followed by the waiter carrying some parcels.

"Put them down, James," she said, and then favored Percy with a cool little bow, to which he responded by a low inclination; for it was more than he had experienced from her in a long time.

She waited till the servant had left the room, and then said to her father:

"I expected to have found you alone, papa; for I wanted to speak to you about something."

Percy's lips twitched as he heard this very broad hint, but he said nothing, and the senator replied, in a nervous way, much at variance with his usual stern, decided manner:

"Yes, my dear, certainly. I was alone, but Mr. Percy was kind enough to call on business—"

"On business!" she echoed, as her father stopped short. "I thought you had given up business since you retired from the company. You told me you were out of it for good."

"So I was, my dear, as far as concerns the active management; but you know I still hold stock in the concern, and Mr. Percy—in short—came to me for a little advice."

Edith took off her furred cloak and threw it over a chair, as she answered, with a slight yawn:

"Oh, is that it? I thought he was capable of managing for himself. How is the business, Mr. Percy?"

It was the first question she had put directly to him for weeks, and he was put into a flutter of pleasure.

"Oh, splendid, splendid!" he hastily ejaculated. "Couldn't be better. Our cars are universally acknowledged to be the finest and most expensive on the track of any road, and we're running out the Emerald men everywhere."

"Indeed? Then how comes it that the stock is quoted so low?" she asked, in the same listless way. "I saw it in the paper this morning at some very low figure. I take little interest in those things, you know, but at the same time I can't help reading."

"Oh, that's a mere newspaper trick of the other side," said Percy, eagerly. "The fact is, none of our stock is on the market anyhow. But never mind the stocks, Miss Wallis. Tell me, didn't you pass by the new house while you were out?"

"Yes," she responded, in the indifferent tone she used constantly now. "I passed by it. It won't be finished for a good year yet, will it?"

"On the contrary, the outside is all done; the carvings are finished, and the plasterers and painters ought to be done before April, at the latest."

Percy gave this information in a tone of unconcealed triumph, adding:

"You know I naturally take a great interest in that house, for we know what depends on its completion."

The senator, who had been watching them furtively, broke in here:

"Yes, my dear, you know—ah—the fact is, Percy and I have been talking over our little family matters; and we have about come to the conclusion that you have had time enough. The building will be ready for occupation before May, and Percy intends to hold you to your promise. You would not break it!"

Edith turned her dark eyes on her father and asked coldly:

"Have I ever broken my promise?"

"Well, yes—that is—not exactly, so to say, broken it directly; but in an indirect way, my dear. You have been so capricious about the house that it has taken more than twice as long to build it as it ought to have done—"

"And I've not grumbled a bit," hastily interrupted Percy. "You can't say that I have, though I've had cause enough, and you know that, Edith."

"Not half what you will have," she retorted, rather disdainfully. "If you had had the spirit of a man, you would have abandoned the thing long ago. I cannot see, for my part, why you persist."

"Because I love you, in spite of all your cruelty to me," said Percy, pleadingly. "I own it, and I don't see why you should be so scornful. I can't help loving you."

"Love," she returned, in the same disdainful way. "Do you always try to make those you love unhappy? I have told you over and over again that I dislike you—"

"But you promised to marry me for all that, as soon as the house was finished and ready for occupation."

"I did, and I am going to keep my word, if you persist in claiming it."

"You are?"

"I am. I have told you so repeatedly. But—but—"

She laid a strong emphasis on the word, and Percy eagerly asked:

"But what?"

"But you will wish I had not kept it, before we have lived together one week, Mr. Percy."

"I'll take the risk of that. I'll make you love me," said Percy, proudly. "I wouldn't persist if I weren't sure of that."

"You are very confident, sir. But there is another but—"

"And that is—?"

"That I must approve of everything in the house, from the sidewalk to the garrets. That was my condition."

"That's reasonable enough," interposed the senator. "You can't complain of that, Percy. There will not be any room for a doubt on the subject. A queen could not help liking everything I shall have there, you know. You will not be unreasonable, Edith?"

"Have I been unreasonable, so far? You have averred that all my alterations were dictated by good taste."

"Oh, yes, I admit that. In fact, I have sometimes wondered where you got it all from. You used to take very little interest in such things."

Edith smiled slightly.

"I have been studying up," she said, "and perhaps I know more than you think I do. Well, Mr. Percy, is that all you have to say?"

"All," answered the young man, more plausibly, "as long as you don't absolutely repudiate our agreement."

"Oh, no, I've never done that. I've told you that I hate you; but I'll keep my word. Good-morning, Mr. Percy."

And she swept out of the room while the old senator muttered to himself:

"She's a smart girl, if I say it. One might think she knew just how I am situated with this fellow."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRAITOR'S FLIGHT.

JOHN RAY, general superintendent and vice-president of the Emerald Car Company, was a very different person from simple John Ray, journeyman, who had tramped to Chicago two years before, with numerous capabilities but only one specialty.

He had set himself, as soon as he entered the works to the task of mastering every detail of the business; economizing in all directions; making artistic work take the place of tawdry, expensive ornament; introducing improvements in the cars; taking out patents for things little in themselves, but of general application; and giving his brain no rest, night or day, from the one task of raising the condition and making money.

Two years thus spent, saving and investing every cent he made, had increased his means to those of a well-to-do man; but the fortune at which he aimed seemed to be as far off as ever, on the day when he read in the paper that Edith Wallis was to marry Stephen Percy in two months more, when their house was to be finished.

It was that intelligence which had brought him back by an earlier train than he had intended to take; for he had at once formed the project of going to Chicago, with some vague idea in his head that he might be able to do something to arrest the threatened demolition of all his hopes.

And the first thing he heard when he arrived in the office, as we have seen, was the name of his rival, ticked out by the telegraph, and following the sentence:

"Ray must be kept away at all hazards."

Only the severe training of experience had enabled him to keep his coolness as he had done and to impose on demoralized Stover, so far as to obtain the whole message from his fears:

As a matter of fact the last sentence was all he had heard, and he was not certain whether or not Stover had deceived him as to the rest, except by the personal behavior of the trembling traitor, who seemed sincerely afraid.

But the contents of the telegram had set his heart beating strangely.

Percy spoke of losses; of affairs being on a precarious footing; of speculations; of money being scarce; and was urgent that John should be kept away from Chicago. Why was all this?

John could not tell; but he resolved to find out what he could from Stover, now that a lucky chance had thrown the traitor into his power; and trusted to his own ingenuity for the rest.

"If their company is in bad condition," he thought, "this may be the chance that I am looking for. There is no reason why it should be so unless it has been badly managed. Percy president? I did not know that; but it would account for the bad management easily enough. But why has Senator Wallis resigned? In all this there is something I do not clearly understand; but I will, before I have done with them all."

He waited in his room that night for Stover, but no Stover came; and when he went to the office next day, Stover was not there either, and Schmidt was fuming and fretting for want of his telegraph clerk, as John came in.

"He must be sick," he told Ray. "I sent to his boarding-house, and had word that his room-door was locked, and that he had complained last night of feeling unwell. It's awkward, because I want to send a private message."

"I'll send it for you," said John, quietly.

Schmidt stared.

"You? What? Do you understand it?"

"Certainly, or I shouldn't offer to send it."

"Well, Ray, I must say you can do more things than any fellow I ever heard of. Where did you learn telegraphing?"

"Learned it in my spare time, along with short-hand."

"Short-hand, too? But why in the world did you learn that?"

"To use, of course. A man can never know too much; and it costs nothing but a little trouble to learn all these modern arts. Whom do you wish to call?"

Schmidt told him, and John sat down and ticked off the message.

When it was over, he said to his chief:

"If I were you, I would send down to Stover's house, and call him up at any hazard. I think there's something wrong."

"Wrong! Impossible!" echoed Schmidt. "Why, that poor fellow has been with us for six years."

"Nevertheless, sir, I've reason to think there's something wrong. I fear Stover has fled the place."

Schmidt turned pale.

"Fled the place! Heavens! I hope not."

And without another word he rushed to the safe, which had not been opened that morning, tried the lock without avail for nearly five minutes, and finally turned to John with a white, scared face.

"I believe what you say is true. The safe has been tampered with, and he was the only man who knew the numbers of the combination besides myself. He has opened it and changed the combination."

"How much was in the safe?" asked Ray.

"More than we could afford to lose. We had the greater part of last month's semi-annual balance in there to pay for material and work. There must have been—Stay, the cash-book will show. No, confound it! That's in there, too."

And the president stared at John in helpless perplexity, while the young man sat thinking on what he should do in the emergency.

Suddenly he jumped up.

"If it be Stover, he's gone with all the money he could lay his hands on, and is easily traced. I'll find him."

He ran out of the office to the little station, and found, as he had expected, that Stover had gone the night before on the *Midnight Express* to the East, toward the city of Boston.

To go back to the office was a matter of a few minutes, and he sat down at the telegraph instrument with a cheerful face, saying to Schmidt, who seemed to be cast down at this sudden misfortune:

"I'll find him for you; trust me."

Then he rung the bell to the next station, and signaled that he wanted to be put on the line to the chief of police, Boston.

To him he telegraphed a full and careful description of Stover's peculiar face and figure, as also the train on which the fugitive had left Smithville, after which he said to Schmidt:

"That will fetch him if he goes there, but I don't think he will. I feel sure it is only a blind to throw us off his track."

"Then where has he gone?" asked Schmidt, in the same helpless way. "I don't know what to do. This breaks up our business, for I don't know how long. We cannot even get into the safe."

"Yes, we can," said John, briskly. "I can open it myself, I think."

"How? The combination has been altered."

John smiled.

"What was the old one?"

"Two-seven-nine," answered Schmidt, in a bewildered way.

"Try two-two-seven," said John. "I have reason to believe he has altered it to that figure."

"Try it yourself," said Schmidt, dolefully. "I've tried long enough."

John went to the safe; turned the handle the prescribed number of times, and, sure enough, the door opened, to the intense amazement of Schmidt, who cried:

"How in the world did you find that?"

"I guessed it from what I heard, only yesterday. The man's mind was full of stocks, and he quoted the price of ours in a telegram that he sent to Percy, only a few hours before his flight."

"To Percy!" ejaculated Schmidt.

"Yes, to Percy. You remember, when I came here two years ago, I told you there was a traitor in your employ?"

"Yes. And do you mean to say—"

"Stover was the man. He has betrayed you systematically, first to Wallis then to this Percy. You never knew how it was that you were underbid by the Diamond Car men, in every transaction before I came. That was the reason."

"And how did you find it out?"

"I suspected Stover the first moment I saw him. I will not say that his appearance was against him, but I was looking for just such a man, and he avoided my eye when we met."

"But why did you not tell me?"

"Because I had other views. I had made up my mind to raise the stock of this company above par, and I did it, as you know, but you don't know how."

Schmidt drew himself up.

"I thought my management had something to do with that."

"So it bad; but do you know how it came about that we always made money on contracts, and left all the losses to the Diamond Car men?"

"Good judgment, of course."

"Not altogether. I contrived to make our traitor betray his fellow-traitor."

"What do you mean?"

"I used to go down to the telegraph office at the railroad station, when I suspected news to be leaking, and read it off the wires. Afterward I would alter it, so as to give the Chicago people false information, to make them take contracts at ruinous figures. It is true I had not much time to do any of this, but I managed to make myself felt. And now comes the question, how much this man has stolen?"

They searched through the safe and found that a package of hundred-dollar gold certificates was gone.

"Only ten thousand dollars," said Schmidt, in a tone of relief. "I thought he would have made a good haul while he was at it."

"The rest is all in cheques," remarked John. "He was not so stupid after all; and you may find it difficult to prove him to be the thief. Have you the numbers of the certificates?"

"No. I never took them."

"Then there will be still more difficulty in the job. I am going to Chicago."

"To Chicago? Why?"

"To hunt this man down. He'll flee to them, or I'm much mistaken."

"To whom?"

"To the Diamond Car Company men. It will be his only resource. I shall go there at once."

"But if you think he is there, why don't you telegraph and have him arrested?"

"Because I can do better."

"Better? How?"

"In the first place, if he is arrested, we shall have to prove the theft, and how are we to do that?"

"But the money is gone, and no one else knew the combination."

"But you cannot even give the number of the gold certificates."

Schmidt's face fell.

"That's true. He may change them all on the way."

"Or even go to Canada."

"In which case—"

"He would be out of our reach. I tell you there is only one thing to be done. I am going to Chicago, at once, to find this man, and I am going to Percy's office the very first thing."

"But what good will that do?"

"Never mind. I have an idea."

Schmidt gave a heavy sigh.

"I wish I knew what it was. Your active, Yankee brain is too quick for me. To think that Stover whom I trusted so entirely, should deceive and rob me, after all my kindness."

"No use crying over spilt milk, Mr. Schmidt. You can take care of things while I'm gone, can't you?"

"I hope so," replied Schmidt, a little stiffly; for he was rather jealous of John's mental superiority, though he made it serve him well.

"I managed to do it before I knew you, Mr. Ray, and—"

"Will, after I'm gone," said John, in per-

fect good-nature, as the German paused, a little awkwardly. "Possibly you may; very likely, indeed. But in the mean time, please to remember that I found your stock at eighty-seven, and that it is now two hundred and twenty-seven, while the Diamond Car stock, which was a hundred and fifty when I left it, is now thirty-five."

"Thirty-five?" echoed Schmidt, "oh, no; you must be mistaken. There's none on the market."

"That's true," answered Ray, quietly; "but I have not stopped watching it for a year past, and have a friend in the City of Chicago who has kept me posted on private sales."

"And who is your friend?"

"He is a friend, not a mere acquaintance, and he watches for me and gives me points, just as Stover has watched for Percy and given him his points. The only difference is that mine have been reliable points, and his were for the most part cooked by me, on purpose to deceive Percy."

"And what do you intend to do when you get to Chicago?"

"That depends on whether I have your entire confidence or not."

Schmidt hesitated, and John noted it with a smile, saying:

"I see. You're not willing to trust any one just now, in the face of Stover's flight. I don't blame you. Very well, then; I'll put it in another form. I am vice-president, and you're the chief in this concern. I own stock worth at par twenty-two thousand dollars, and that's all. How much do you own, or can you control?"

"About five times as much," answered Schmidt, eagerly. "Aba! I see what you mean; to hypothecate it and buy out the other company. Don't you?"

"I've not said so. But I have heard of worse plans. What I want to know is this: suppose I could make a purchase of a controlling interest in the Diamond Car Company, would you be willing to help me with the necessary funds and divide the profits equally?"

Schmidt raised his eyebrows.

"Equally? Well, I must say you are rather too cool. Do you think your little twenty-two thousand amounts to anything in the stock market? My young friend, you're green yet. To go in there, half a million is the smallest sum a lawable in these days, and I don't propose to risk my hard-earned money in any speculations. No, if you choose to go to Chicago and catch Stover, if you can find him, and get back the money, well and good; but you must manage any speculation that you may engage in, all by yourself."

John nodded.

"You're quite right. I expected the answer. You have a family; I, none. I'll sell you my stock, if you like. What will you give me for it?"

"The market price. But surely you would not be so foolish, Ray. It is going up all the time. It will be two hundred and fifty before July, at the rate it rises."

"Perhaps you're right," returned John, in a reflective way: "anyhow, if I need the money, I can sell it anywhere. Now, Mr. Schmidt, I can't tell how long I am to be away. I may never come back—"

"What?" echoed Schmidt, jumping up.

"I may never come back. As you say, you got along without me before I came, and you may do as well after I'm gone. It may be best for me to resign my place before I go."

Schmidt caught him by the arm.

"My dear Ray, my dear boy, I was only jesting. I could not get along without you. Take all the leave of absence you need, but you cannot, must not, leave this company at any price."

CHAPTER XX. PERCY'S PERPLEXITIES.

WHEN Mr. Stephen Percy went home after his interview with Edith Wallis and her father, he could not help a vague sense of dissatisfaction.

He had gained nothing but mere hope, and his hopes, so far, had proved to be delusive, as related to the marriage with the woman he was set on having.

Stephen Percy had never, till he met Edith Wallis, known what it was to have his will crossed. He had been born to riches, cradled in luxury; had been taught by a private tutor and sent to the most expensive college in America, in the hope of a fond father that he might turn out an intellectual prodigy.

But he had not turned out any such thing. His tutor had been unable to beat much into his head, and he had failed to do anything in college, so that his father had taken refuge in the belief that his son was born for business, being too proud to accept the conviction forced on every one else who knew Stephen Percy, that he was a young man of rather stupid character naturally, with a measureless amount of jealousy and self-conceit.

Out of college, after a third "plucking" at examination, he had been jumped into railroading, in a purely ornamental office, on one of

his father's roads, and had for a time seemed to have found his vocation.

At all events, he had exhibited plenty of energy in finding fault with every one and everything, and ordering about the subordinates of the road, as if he had been the heir apparent to a throne.

Then, after awhile, it was found that his interference had roused so much bad blood among employees, and done so much harm, that his father had to remove him and put him elsewhere, in a position where it was thought he could do no harm to the Percy property. So the old gentleman had bought Diamond Car Company stocks, till he controlled the board of the company, and put in his son as secretary under old Wallis; between whom and the elder Percy there had been an understanding, from the time of Edith Wallis's birth, that she should marry the hopeful Stephen some day.

Both the elder Wallis and the elder Percy had been self-made men, and, like most self-made men, they wanted their children to be spared the trials of their own youth. And, like most parents, they were doomed to be grievously disappointed.

Old Percy realized, when it was too late to help it, that his son was a selfish and obstinate fool, who was determined to do as he pleased in the pride of his ignorance, and Septimus Wallis found out that his daughter, whom he had fondly hoped to be as plastic to his will as wax, had a mind of her own, and had inherited every atom of his firmness of purpose, while it was set on opposing his will in the most cherished desire of his life.

And so matters had stood at the time when old Percy died, leaving the young man whom we have known as Stephen Percy heir to a fortune which might have made thousands of human beings happy, but which that industrious youth had settled in his own mind should contribute to nothing but enabling him to have his own way in everything.

His position as secretary of the Diamond Car Company, while it had given him no power as long as Senator Wallis chose to keep the presidency, had made him well acquainted with that gentleman's affairs; and he had early discovered that the senator was not so rich as many people thought.

And Percy, while stupid in some things, was always alive to any means of getting a hold on any person he could.

He had found that the senator, being in politics, had been living beyond his income, and sometimes had to sell stock to make both ends meet, so that Stephen, even during his father's lifetime, had often bought stock from Wallis, or had advanced money on it, so as to get the old man into his power.

The elder Percy had always helped him in these transactions, approving his son's methods, and evincing an aptitude for "business."

And business, in old Percy's ideas, as in the ideas of many other people, consisted in getting as much power over everybody as possible.

Thus it resulted that, a year before the death of Stephen's father, Senator Wallis had resigned the presidency of the Diamond Car Company in Stephen's favor, and ever since that the young man had been diligently swallowing the whole concern for himself.

Then came his father's death; and Stephen found himself one of the richest men in Chicago, with only one person able to defy his will, and that person a woman. And he had made up his mind that he would marry Edith Wallis, no matter how much she hated him. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; she would give him a social distinction that nothing else could give him; and, moreover, she was the only person that had ever dared to oppose his will, and he was determined to conquer her, as he had conquered her father, by dint of money.

By money he had made her proud and stubborn father bend to him, and coaxed Edith to the promise she had given, before she met John Ray the second time, to marry Stephen Percy as soon as the wonderful house was finished.

It was with a vague idea that she could keep the work going long enough to tire out Stephen, and being fancy-free at the time, that she had allowed the promise to be wrung from her, and she had been brought to repent it bitterly since, when it was too late.

For our lady readers have, of course, long since found out that Edith Wallis was no longer fancy-free, after her second interview with John Ray in her father's library.

No young woman behaves as she did on that memorable occasion without a cause, and that cause a flutter of the heart.

Edith had discovered then what she had not known before, that, besides Percy being actively disagreeable to her, some one else was actively agreeable, and the knowledge had frightened her when she reflected on a future life to be spent with the man she hated.

But John Ray, going away as he had done, and staying away for two long years, during which she had never heard from him, was beginning to fade slowly from her mind; while Percy, whose one redeeming point was that he had always treated her with adoration and striven

to please her, was slowly becoming less disagreeable, and it was only when he urged immediate marriage that she disliked him actively.

But Percy did not know what was going on in her heart, and therefore felt, as he went away from the house, that he had given up something he ought not to have abandoned, and that he must hurry up matters in some way or other.

"I'll go and telegraph to Stover," he said to himself. "I can't help thinking that some correspondence is going on between her and that fellow, Ray. It's not reasonable that a woman should resist me so long as she has done, without some other man in the case."

And it was while in this frame of mind that he went to the private telegraph office where he was in the habit of communicating with Stover, and found, lying in the register, the message that brought from him the answer we have recorded elsewhere.

He was very much excited that night by receiving another telegram, this time coming to his door by public messenger, which startled him with the following information:

"We are discovered. I am coming on. Ray has found us out. STOVER."

And the message was dated from the city of Buffalo, so that Percy knew that something serious must have happened, or Stover would not have left Smithville.

Now, for the first time, the young man knew what it was to be left to his own resources in a position of peril.

Ray has found us out.

What had Ray found? that was the question. Percy, as he remembered a number of things in the past, began to wish that he had some one to lean on for advice.

"If Stover has been found out and has run away," he reasoned, "he has done something more than to communicate with me. If Ray has found him out, the man may say something to criminate me. What shall I do?"

After thinking a long time, he made up his mind to tell Senator Wallis and ask his advice the very next day; and while he was planning what to say so as not to give the shrewd old senator any advantage over him, the door-bell rung and a third message came to him.

It was dated from Dunkirk, and ran:

"Meet me at Toledo. Nothing else is safe. Ray will follow me, I fear. STOVER."

Percy was at his wits' end to know what was meant by the message.

CHAPTER XXI.

RED MIKE TURNS UP.

STEPHEN PERCY slept but little that night, for a vague uneasiness that could not quite fix itself on any one act, caused him to fear, he knew not what or how much.

Stover wanted him to come to Toledo, as "nothing else would be safe."

That showed that Stover had been found out in something bad, and Percy could not tell what it might be, or how far he himself might be affected by it. So far as he knew, he had engaged in no criminal act, but he was by no means sure whether all his dealings with his fugitive clerk would bear public inspection; and the guarded language of the telegram told him little.

"I'll go to Toledo," he said to himself. "He must be coming on by the shore line, and I can meet him at noon, if I take an early train."

At daybreak, therefore, he was off, and walked to the station, without telling any one at home where he was going, so fearful was he of attracting any attention. He hoped to be back before night, and have Stover in some safe place, where he would be in no danger of arrest and consequent exposure.

He walked quietly through the streets, and had got near the station without being noticed, when he was stopped by a beggar, who got in his way with the usual furtive manner of his class, monotonously whining:

"Oh, for the love of God, your honor, give a poor fellow a few pennies to buy a loaf of bread."

The young man walked on, not noticing the beggar, and pulling up his coat-collar to hide his face, but the other followed him up, whining:

"Ah, yer honor, I know you're goin' to give me su'thin', and indeed I hain't eat nothin' since yesterday mornin'. Help a poor workin' man, out of a job, your honor."

Percy felt irritated at his pertinacity, and snapped out:

"Clear out. I've nothing for you. Be off, I say. I don't give to beggars."

But the man only followed him the more closely, whining:

"Ah, your honor. I'm starvin'. It's God's truth, your honor, I hain't eat nothin' since yesterday."

And he actually laid his hand on the young man's arm in his pertinacity, when Percy turned furiously round, and struck off the intrusive hand.

"How dare you?" he cried. "Do you want me to give you in charge, you scoundrel?"

He saw a big, burly tramp, in rags, and the

tramp seemed to be not at all afraid of him, even in the public street, for he peered into Percy's face in the fast increasing light of the morning, and cried out, in a tone of satisfaction:

"I thort I know'd yer, boss. Why, if it ain't Mr. Percy, by gosh!"

Percy started back and looked at the tramp, half-amazedly, half in terror. He did not recognize the man, but the man knew him, and Percy had hoped to get away quietly for his little expedition to Toledo.

To get rid of the annoyance, he put his hand in his pocket, and took out some silver, saying more placably:

"There, there, my good fellow; take that and leave me alone. I'm in a hurry."

The tramp took the money eagerly, and became humble and obsequious in a moment, without, however, ceasing to be familiar, for he stuck close to Percy.

"Thank yer honor. God bless yer honor," he ejaculated, rapidly. "I knew that it was all a mistake and yer honor didn't know my face, or your honor would have given me all I wanted 'fore. I see your honor remembers me."

"No, I don't," replied Percy, shortly, "and I don't want to do it, either. There, I've given you your money; now clear out. I'm in a hurry to catch a train."

But the tramp would not take the hint, and persisted in walking on beside him, toward the station, saying as he went:

"All right, your honor; all right. I'm the last man in the world to push in where I ain't wanted; but your honor don't remember me, so it's all right. I know your honor very well. Your honor once paid me and my pal, Sandy Joe, a nice little sum to watch a man. I see your honor don't remember me, and I've been a-tryin' to see yer honor for a good month, and couldn't, 'cause of the cops and the nigger waiters round yer honor's house. Now I've got the chance I ain't goin' to let yer honor go without a little talk."

And as he spoke he ran his arm in through that of Percy, and held on with such a firm strength, that the young man could not disengage it without a serious struggle, as he felt, the moment the other touched him.

And the dawn was brightening into a winter's day, while the people were beginning to dot the streets more frequently, and Percy, above all things, wanted to avoid observation.

"See here," he said, in a low tone, as he went on, "who are you, and what do you want with me?"

"I'm Mike Marble, as they calls Red Mike, that's who I am," was the reply. "You know me well enough, Mr. Percy. You paid me to watch Jasper Ray, two years ago, and drive him outer the city, and I did it—me and Sandy Joe. You know me well enough."

Percy started. The tramp had really recalled him to his memory, and he said hastily, stopping short:

"Oh, yes, yes. I remember now. You did that well, very well. I'm glad to see you of course. Now, what do you want?"

Red Mike's face expanded into a grin.

"Ah, that's the talk. Thought ye didn't quite know me, Percy. What do I want? Well, I want to know if ye hain't got any more sick jobs. I'm gittin' down to hard-pan, I am, and I'm ready to do a'most anything for a livin'; I'm gittin' tired of trampin'. It ain't what it used ter be, nor I ain't nuther. Wot with tramp laws, and work'h'uses, and jails, and the cold weather, I want to go to Floriddy for the winter, and I hain't got the money to go, I hain't. Gimme fifty dollars fur a start."

Percy shook him off indignantly at last, roused by the impudence of the demand, and ejaculating:

"Give you fifty dollars! Confound your insolence, what do you mean? Get away from me, or I'll call the policeman to you."

Red Mike squared himself insolently before him.

"No, yer won't. I don't keer if ye do. I want fifty dollars, and I'm a-goin' to have it, too, or ye don't go on that train ye're runnin' to ketch."

Then, as Stephen hesitated, partly from physical fear, partly from his desire to get off without attracting notice, the tramp added more peaceably:

"Now look a-here boss. A gentleman like you kin afford to be gin'rous. I did your work well enough, two year ago. I skeered that feller so he took the train East, and hain't never come back sence, and I kin do it ag'in, if so be he gets over his skeer and comes back. I'm a feller it pays to keep around a gentleman, I am. Air you quite suro you don't want me?"

Percy looked at him and a thought came into his head which made him say:

"Perhaps I might. Where do you live?"

"Hotel de Sidewalk," was the reply, in an airy manner. "If you wanter see me, jest say whar, and I'll come."

Percy nodded absently. He was thinking more of how to get rid of the man than anything else.

"I'm going East, and I shall be back, in all probability, by the train that gets in at six. If you see me then, follow me till I give you a

signal to come up. I may want you, and I may not."

Red Mike drew back respectfully.

"All right, boss," he said. "I'm agreeable. Say, you couldn't give a feller a dollar to get su'thia' decent to eat, could yer?"

Percy shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and pulled out the dollar, saying:

"There, there. Now get out, get out. I'm tire'd of this sort of thing."

And he hurried away to the station, while Red Mike muttered to himself with a grin:

"Struck him pretty well that time, I reckon. I thort he'd come down, ef I hit hard."

Then Mr. Marble departed for the shades of a neighboring bar-room, where he appeared to be well known; for the proprietor greeted him with a nod as he entered, and inquired:

"Well, Mike, what is it to-day? He's dead, you know. Died last week."

"Who's dead?" returned Mike, with a lordly air, leaning on the bar.

The proprietor pointed to the well-known portrait of the defunct dog with its legend proclaiming the death of "Trust," and observed:

"He hain't kicked onc't, Mike. He's dead as a door-nail."

Mike grinned at the delicate thrust and retorted:

"He don't wanter kick fur me. I'm a capitalist, I am. Why, I've got rocks enough to build a dam fur all the whisky you got in your cellar. Bring out the bottle, ye old thief, and don't be a-keepin' a feller-creeter waitin'."

The proprietor stared at Mike and Mike stared at the proprietor, as the latter gentleman held out his hand with the palm upward, reiterating:

"He's dead, Mike. Hain't got 'nuff money to pay fur a decent funeral. Takin' up a c'lection. How much'll you give?"

"Waal," said Mike, reflectively; "I reckon it's cheapest by the drink fur me, at five cents."

"Ten," responded the landlord, with gentle firmness; "ten to you, Mike. Come, fork over the dime, and I'll give yer the glass and the bottle. I ain't mean with old customers, but I hev to make a livin'; and you know that."

Mike heaved a sigh and fished up a dime from some recess in his rags, slapping it on the counter, saying:

"Now then, trot her out."

"I'd like ter see the dime fu'st," the landlord observed, noticing that Mike kept his hand on it. "Biz is biz."

With another sigh, Mike removed his hand, and the landlord, after a sharp glance at the coin, took out a bottle and glass, and shoved them over to the tramp, sweeping the dime into his change-drawer.

Mike's eyes sparkled as he saw the liquor, and he fully justified the caution of the landlord in getting his pay and charging double his usual price, by filling the tumbler to the brim and swigging it off at a gulp.

Th' n be observed gleefully:

"Got the best of yer that time, Tim."

"No, yer didn't," responded Tim, calmly.

"Why not?" demanded his customer, with a grin that showed he was ready for a contest of repartee.

"'Cause you drank outer the old soak's bottle, Mike. It don't pay to hand you over the reg'lar. You kin have all yer want at ten cents a drink, that-a-way."

So saying, Tim calmly proceeded to fill up the bottle with water, while Mike examined closely the tumbler from which he had just drank, and finally exclaimed with an accent of profound conviction:

"Tim, you're fly, you air. What d'yer call that glass?"

The landlord quietly took it from his hand, and proceeded to wash it, with the dry remark:

"That's what I call the *beat's horn*. It don't hold 'nuff to hurt, and I gives it to them as allers fills up."

Mike looked at him admiringly.

"It's a cold day when you get left, Tim."

"You bet," was the frigid reply. "Now then, one drink don't call fur more nor ten minutes by that stove. I've got a livin' to make."

Mike took the hint and went and sat down by the stove, with one eye on the clock. He was a veteran at the art of getting something for nothing, and the landlord knew him of old.

Mike was cogitating how to make the most of what money he had till the return of Percy; for the tramp had a firm reliance that back the young millionaire would come.

His drink had not affected him in the least, from the fact that the "old soak's bottle," of which Tim spoke, was always diluted with water, and Mike had realized it after it was all down. He waited till his ten minutes was up; and then, as Tim came from behind the bar to eject him, said hastily:

"Hold on, hold on. I want breakfast. I ain't on the beat to-day."

"If you ain't on the beat, where's your money?" demanded Tim. "You can't come no games over me, young feller."

With another deep sigh Mike fished up the

dollar bill, and spread it out on his knee, when Tim's manner instantly changed to one of profound respect, as he drew back, saying:

"Oh, that makes a difference, Mr. Marble. You kin have as good a lay-out as there air in Chicago, fur twenty-five cents."

"Then I'll take it, with all the fixin's, and be quick about it," returned Mike, in a lordly manner, stowing away the bill in his rags. "You kin go and git it ready, Tim. I'll see to the bar."

Tim went behind the bar, drew back a panel in the wall, and called out:

"Jessie! Jessie!"

"Well, responded a woman's voice, while the odor of fried onions crept through the aperture and ascended the nostrils of Red Mike, like unto costly incense. "What d'yer want?"

"Breakfast for a gent, Jessie, and be quick about it. Gent's in a hurry."

Then he leaped on the bar and looked at Mike steadfastly, observing:

"Pretty cold mornin', Mr. Marble. Just the time fur a nip to take the edge off yer stum-mick."

"I don't want no edge off my stummick," was the stolid response; for Mike knew well enough what the landlord was at—to get him to spend that dollar bill.

"Then yer don't object to takin' a drink with me, I s'pose," said Tim, seductively. "Come, Mr. Marble, you and me's old friends, and I don't wanter make no profit off yer. What'll yer have?"

Mike leaped from his chair as if he had been galvanized into new life, stood up to the bar and answered promptly:

"Rye and rock. You put in the rock, and I'll tend to the rye."

Tim instantly set up on the bar a glass of very different proportions to those of the "beat's horn," shoved over a bottle of whisky, and observed:

"Help yerself to both."

And he set a smaller bottle by the side of the other, from both which Mike mixed a portentous drink, and imbibed it slowly, with evident gusto, the landlord watching him, with his head on one side, and the gracious remark:

"Drink hearty."

Then Mike, for the first time that day, began to feel, as he afterward expressed it, "like a bird," and it was an easy task for the astute landlord by dint of breakfast, drinks, and other small and large charges, to inveigle him, before the close of that day, not only out of his dollar bill, but all the silver that Percy had given him besides, to the amount of very nearly another dollar, after which Tim, discovering that he had no more cash, turned as cold as an iceberg in his demeanor, and finally remarked:

"Come, Mike, it's time you got out of here, or paid for yer lodgin'. It's nigh onto six."

Mike heard the last words, though he was about a quarter drunk at the time, and shambled up to his feet.

"Six o'clock, is it? By gosh, Tim, I've got to go and see a rich feller as wants to hire me for a waiter."

"A what?" echoed Tim, scornfully.

"A waiter, by gosh! He wants me to wait fur him, and I've been waitin' fur him all day. Say, Tim, I wanter ax you a question. S'posin' you was me, and a rich feller wanted yer to lay fur a pore feller and knock him, what would you do?"

Tim looked at him reflectively.

"It'd depend on what he paid."

"That's jest me, Tim. And s'pose he paid handsome?"

"Then I'd go fur the pore feller every time, so long as I didn't get into trouble with the law."

Mike scratched his head reflectively.

"The law? What do you know 'bout the law, Tim? Mebbe you mought tell me what's safe?"

Tim shook his head.

"I ain't no lawyer. Whenever I has trouble, I goes to one man, and he allers knows how to help me out."

"And who is he, Tim?"

"Why, O'Rourke, to be sure; the best man in the city. What he don't know 'bout the law ain't wu'th knowin'. He got me outer—"

And here Tim stopped suddenly, fearing he might say too much, and added:

"Ef you wanter lay fur a feller and knock him fur stamps, don't you do it 'fore you've seen O'Rourke. He'll tell you whether it's safe or not. So long."

And Tim began to wash up his glasses as Mike shambled out, muttering to himself, as he watched the tramp's exit:

"Wonder if any one'd trust that galoot on a job of that kind? Must be a reg'lar durned fool if he does."

Meantime Mike betook himself to the station and reached there just as the people were coming out from the six o'clock train.

He watched the crowd, and at last saw the man he was looking for coming out with a second person, a small man, who kept his hat slouched over his eyes.

Mike instantly threw himself in the way, de-

termined not to be rebuffed, but, a little to his surprise, Percy nodded as he passed, and said, in an undertone:

"Glad to see you. Where can you show me a quiet place near by?"

"Foller me," answered Mike, readily. "I'll show yer the place, boss."

And he shambled off before them to the domicile of the virtuous Tim, and was leading the way into the bar-room, when Percy hurriedly said:

"No, no; that won't do. Isn't there a private door? I want a room."

"I'll get ye one," responded Mike, all in a tremor of excitement now that he saw something was really in the wind. Then he darted in and said to Tim, in an undertone:

"Come quick to the side-door. There's a queer case, and we hain't no time to lose. Want a room fur a gent. Lots of rocks. It's the gent I to d ye of. He's come."

And Tim, hastily summoning the hitherto invisible Jessie, who turned out to be a slatternly female of uncertain age, to take care of the bar, went to the side-door of the house and ushered in Percy and the short man, who both kept their collars up and their hats over their eyes, as if afraid of recognition.

Tim took his cue in a moment, for he had had long experience of criminal life in Chicago. He saw that it was a "queer" case, and therefore likely to be lucrative to him.

"Private room, of course. This way," he said, without being asked, and led them down a long passage, up different flights of stairs, and down other passages, till he ushered them into a room where he lighted a gas jet—for it was dark by this time—and said, quietly:

"This room's five dollars a day, gents, with board, and no questions axed. If ye want anything, there's a speakin'-tube out to the bar in this corner, but the terms is weekly in advance. Which on ye wants it?"

"I do," responded the little man, in a low, nervous tone. "I'm willing to pay the terms. But is it *quite* private?"

"No one comes here but me, and I don't never ax no questions," returned Tim. "The terms is in advance, gents."

"Certainly, certainly," said the little man, in a nervous way, "here's a hundred in advance, landlord, if you're *sure* it's quite safe."

Tim took the bill—it was of a bright yellow color and bore the word GOLD across the face, in skeleton letters, covering the denomination. He looked at it narrowly, then tucked it away and answered the question.

"Safe? Why bless your innocence, any one kin see you're not an old hand. Safe? Yes. There ain't a cop could ever get ye here without I had time to warn ye, and I'll show ye a place to hide where they'd never find ye at all. So long."

He went out leaving the three in the dark room, which had no window to the open air.

As soon as he had gone the little man sunk down on a chair, sighing:

"My God! I thought I'd never get here. Who is this, Mr. Percy?"

He looked at Red Mike, who stood by them in an attitude of respect, waiting orders.

"This is the man I spoke of," said Percy. "He hunted Ray out of the city, once before, and he can do it again. You say he's the only man you fear?"

"The only one," replied the little man. "I can fool old Schmidt easy enough, if we can only fix Ray."

"Very well," answered Percy.

Then he turned to Mike. "You did a good job for me once, and I want you to repeat it. A man will come in tomorrow from the East, and I want him put out of the way. It's the same man you drove out before. Can you undertake the job?"

Mike pursed up his lips.

"That's a matter of rocks, boss, stamps, cash, money. If you'll pay 'nuff, I'm ready to do anything."

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. O'ROURKE'S VISITOR.

MR. O'ROURKE, counselor-at-law, with the largest criminal practice in the city of Chicago, sat in his office at the evening reception hour, with the pile of ten-dollar bills on his table higher than usual, as one after another of his unprepossessing clients came up, fee in hand, to entreat the eloquent Irish advocate to plead his cause.

He had noticed that the last man in the row of applicants had a face that was new to him; for O'Rourke had a speaking acquaintance with every thief in Chicago; but he did not pay any special attention to him till the rest had gone away satisfied, and his book of engagements was full, when he said to the newcomer:

"Well, and what do you want?"

Then the new client came slowly up to the table, displaying a villainous face, surrounded with a ring of red hair, surmounting a burly body, clad in a suit of black, of glossy newness, very unusual in O'Rourke's experience, and

said, in a husky sort of whisper, as if the speaker had a chronic cold:

"Kin I speak to ye alone, boss? It's a case as has got money in it—heaps."

O'Rourke looked at his face keenly.

"Ye don't look like a man into a rich case," he answered. "I've seen your kind before. Ye've been knocking some one down for his money, that's all."

The stranger put up his hands as if to protest against the verdict.

"No, boss, on my word, no. I hain't been into no trouble. It only a case of conscience."

"A case of what?"

O'Rourke's shrewdly sarcastic glance seemed to be perfectly intelligible to the other, for he grinned slyly as he answered:

"Ah, well, counselor, you allers would hev yer joke. You think I hain't got no sorter conscience; but I have. Look a-here, to prove it."

And he laid down a twenty-dollar bill on the table, adding:

"That's the retainer; so ye see I hev got a conscience as good as the next."

O'Rourke rose up without answering, and went into the little back office.

The man at the table did not know that the lawyer did so on purpose to test him, leaving the pile of bills on the table; and, as soon as O'Rourke's back was gone, he quietly took two ten-dollar bills out of the pile, and left his twenty on top, looking up as innocently as a lamb as O'Rourke came back, the lawyer observing:

"You can come inside."

"Stay," he added, as the red-headed man got up to obey. "I may as well count my money first."

Which he proceeded to do, and as soon as he got to the end of it, stuffed the bills into his pocket, held out his open hand to the innocent-looking thief, and observed in the most commonplace tone in the world.

"Ye did that nately, my friend. Come; fork over your retainer, or get out."

The stranger looked amazed.

"Retainer! What retainer? I jest paid it."

"Oh, no," was the smiling reply, "if ye were better acquainted with the science of optics, ye would not have tried on any such clumsy tricks. Just look at that door yonder."

The red-headed man looked at the door to which he was pointed, and saw that there was a small looking glass, at the height of a man's face, in which a man entering the small office, could see everything that went on at his back.

"Ye didn't exactly rob me," pursued the counselor, smilingly; "because if ye had, I'd be more severe with ye. Ye can chate all the rest of the world as much as ye like, me rufous friend, but ye mustn't do it in *this* office. Come, do ye want advice or not? If not, get out."

Slowly and unwillingly the red-headed man dived into his pocket, and fished out a ten-dollar bill.

"There it is," he grumbled; "now take me in there. I don't want the clerks to hear it."

"When you give me the other," was the composed reply, as O'Rourke tucked the bill into his pocket. "Ten dollars don't pay for a private talk."

"You hain't got no conscience at all," growled the red-headed man, as he fished out the other bill. "Now, then, will that do?"

"That will do," said O'Rourke, smiling as he pocketed the second bill. "Now, then, come along."

And he led the way into the small office, set his visitor down in a chair, put the table between them, with the red-headed man in the corner, and opened a small drawer hidden under the edge of his own side of the table, in which reposed a small, handsomely plated pistol, with a barrel as large as a common rifle.

It was a matter of habit with him, dealing as he did with the desperate classes of society, never to hold private interviews without a derringer under his hand, and the man who had come to him was evidently a hard case.

"Now, then," he continued, "what do ye want in the way of advice?"

The red-headed man hung his head.

"I'm in a little trouble, boss."

"I suppose so, or ye wouldn't be coming here. What have ye done?"

"Nothen, boss, nothen."

"Then ye don't want my help, if ye tell the truth. But of course ye're lying. Come, make a c'lane breast of it. I'm yer counsel, and ye can't gain anything by lying to me. What have ye done?"

"Nothen, boss, yet."

"Aha! I see; go on."

He took his hand off the pistol.

"Ye want to do something and to find out if ye can sail close to the law and yet weather it. Is that it?"

"That's jest it, boss. You see—"

"I don't see anything. What's yer name, sir?"

"Mike Marble; but the folks mostly calls me Red Mike."

"A good name, Mike. Ye know ye have the chief angel for a patron saint; the fellow that

downed Satan every time he met him. Now, then, what d'ye want to do?"

"I wanter—I wanter—"

O'Rourke frowned at him.

"Kill a man. I know ye. No, ye can't do it safely, Mike. So don't think of it."

Mike stared at him aghast.

"I didn't say nothen 'bout it. How'd you know I meant that?"

"By yer face, Mike. I know all the kinds, from petty larceny to burglary. Ye're not a professional, Mike. Ye haven't the brains to be anything but a footpad. Now, then, who wants ye to kill a man?"

"I didn't say nobody did."

"Ye didn't. Well, who was it?"

"Mebbe you kin tell, sence ye'r so smart. I ain't in court, boss."

"Ye will be, in a week more, Mike, unless ye mend yer ways. Who gave ye the money for that suit of clothes?"

"That's my own business."

"All right, me boy, then the sooner ye go home the better. Ye don't want any advice in this office."

And O'Rourke leaned back in his chair and watched the other keenly: for he saw that a struggle was going on in Mike's mind whether to tell what he came to tell, or to go away irresolute.

Presently the visitor said:

"See here, boss, I didn't come here to be sassed, but to ax advice."

"State yer case, and I'll give it."

"Well, then, boss, there's a rich gent in this city, as has paid me afore to do jobs, wants me to do another for him, and I don't know whether it's safe or not—"

"Who's the rich gentleman?"

"That's tellin's, boss."

"Then tell some one else and get them to give you advice. I can't afford to waste time with you."

So saying, O'Rourke rose, not that he had any idea of going; but he knew how to deal with the secretive class of men to which his visitor belonged.

The threat had its effect; for Red Mike immediately exclaimed:

"Don't go, boss, don't. I'll tell yer all, indeed I will, but give a man time."

O'Rourke sat down again, and took out his watch, saying sternly:

"I'll give ye five minutes, and not one second more. Me time's worth a dollar a minute, and ye've fooled away a good fifteen dollars' worth. State yer case and tell me all the names, or ye get no advice from me. Who wants ye to do the job, and what is it?"

The red-headed man looked round the room in a furtive, apprehensive way.

"For God's sake, don't tell on me, boss. He's as rich as Crazes."

"Who is he? It's me business to keep me clients' secrets."

"It's Percy," whispered Mike, "young Percy, that jest come inter a fortin. He hired me worst afore to foller a man and drive him outer the city, and now he wants me to lay fur him on some dark night and finish him. He's give me a hundred dollar to start, and promises a thousand fur the job, and what I wanter know is, if you'll defend me if I get found out. That's all, boss."

O'Rourke, for once in his life, was taken aback by a scamp.

"And is that all you want?" he asked.

"Yes, that is—not quite."

"Oh, not quite? Well?"

"I wanter be able to prove a *alleybi*, and I wanter know if a *alleybi* is a good defense?"

This did not astonish O'Rourke so much, for all criminals have heard of the *alibi*, and it is a favorite defense with them.

"An *alibi* is good if you can prove it, Mike, but how are you going to prove one when you are to do the job?"

Mike grinned.

"You leave me alone for that. I've got a man that looks jest like me to help in the job, though he ain't to do it, bein' only a tramp. He's a cousin of mine, with the same name, and he's to be in with me. Then an *alleybi*'s good, is it?"

"If you can prove it. But who is the man you are to finish?"

"That's tellin's," returned Mike, with a grin more sinister than before. "Mind, you're retained as my counsel, and I kin send fur ye whenever I want. What'll ye argy the case fur and how much to get me off fur good?"

"I don't make any such bargains. You came here for advice, and I give it to you. If you go into this job, as you call it, for Percy, you and he are both liable to be hung, and I will not defend you."

"You won't?" growled Red Mike, starting.

"Why, you're jest as mean as dirt, you are, arter I've paid you a retainer."

"And what's more, if you try to execute this plan," pursued O'Rourke sternly, "I'll have you locked up where you'll do no more mischief."

"You will?" cried Mike, savagely; "then mebbe you'll look out for yourself."

And as he spoke he thrust his hand back to-

ward his hip, only stopping as he was confronted by the muzzle of the lawyer's derringer, while O'Rourke said, in the mildest of voices:

"Take it away, me friend, take it away. Ye couldn't prove an *alibi* here. Now sit ye down quietly and talk rason, or I'll make a nice little corpse of ye."

Mike sat down, scowling, and the lawyer continued, calmly:

"I've been studying your face, Mike, and I don't think ye have a cousin. There's not two Red Mikes in the world. Nature broke the mold when she made ye. Now tell me how much Percy gave ye for the job ye did before."

"I won't do no such thing," growled Mike. "It's none of yer biz."

"Very well, then."

The lawyer touched a spring-bell, and a clerk came to the door and looked in.

"Mr. Roberts," said O'Rourke, placidly, "this gentleman wants the nearest policeman as quick as ye can get him."

"No, I don't," blurted out Mike, alarmed.

"Ye do, I tell ye. Ye want to take a nice night's lodging, and have yer portrait taken in the morning, free of expense, to be hung in the gallery, where the other thieves belong," said O'Rourke, with a grim smile. "Will ye go, or will ye make a cl'ane breast of it?"

"I'll tell all," faltered Mike, turning pale at the quiet resolution of the other.

"Mr. Roberts, ye can wait a bit," said the lawyer, smiling at the clerk. "Touch the police bell, however, so the patrolman on duty at the corner can have a good look at the gentleman. I want him to know him again."

"Very good, sir," answered Roberts, and he vanished, while Red Mike pulled out a large cotton handkerchief, and began to wipe his forehead, looking worried.

"Now, Mr. Mike," pursued O'Rourke, in a stern manner, "who's the party that ye're laying for? Bedad, I think I can tell ye before ye tell me. His name's Ray."

Mike started up, looking terrified, and then fell back in his chair crying faintly:

"How did you know it?"

"Never mind. I see I've hit it. Now, me friend, listen to me. Mr. Ray's my friend. D'ye understand? My friend."

Mike looked more and more haggard; for the argument was one which fully appealed to his nature. O'Rourke was too well versed in criminal ways to hunt for his moral sense; but even a tramp understands that *friendship* is a thing not to be lightly offended.

"Yes," pursued O'Rourke, "you came to the wrong shop for advice as to how to lay for *my friend*. Ye should have gone to Hubbell and Hughes, ye should. They might have helped ye. But now ye're in here, ye'll tell me all, or I'll be the worse for ye. I'll give ye five minutes, and if ye haven't told me all then, I'll call in the patrolman."

So saying, he opened his watch and sat there, glancing from the time-piece to Red Mike, and back again, keeping his derringer covering the cowering tramp, who employed the time in wiping his forehead, till O'Rourke snapped his watch to, and observed briskly:

"Time's up!"

He was just laying his hand on the bell, when Mike broke down, crying:

"Don't, don't. I'll tell ye God's truth. I will, boss, honest."

"Spin her out then," returned O'Rourke, dryly. "When did you see Percy, and what did ye tell ye?"

"I seen him yesterday night, and he told me how the man would be on to-day, by the late train, and I was to lay for him if I got a chance, and knock him in some dark street."

"Then what made you come here?"

"I wanted to see if it were safe, boss. I didn't know the gent were a friend of yourn. I swear I didn't."

"Well, he is," returned O'Rourke, dryly; "and I warn ye, if ye touch a hair of his head, I'll put men on ye who'll hunt ye to the ends of the earth, and put ye on a slow fire to roast, so I will. Now, have ye been to the train after yer man yet?"

"No, boss; it ain't time. The train comes in at eight."

O'Rourke looked at his watch once more.

"It's seven and a quarter. Go to the train, find the gentleman, and tell him I'm waiting for him here. D'ye understand? And mind ye, come back with him, or don't stay in Chicago. I'll have ye over a hot fire before morning, if ye fail me."

Red Mike rose up, with the perspiration streaming down his face, and O'Rourke added suddenly:

"Stop. I forgot. Ye'll not need that pistol. Ye'll take it out, and give it to yer counsel. It's not safe to trust the likes of ye with fire-arms."

Without a word, Mike put his hand to his pistol pocket, and hauled out a brand new revolver, which he laid on the table, and which O'Rourke put into his drawer, remarking:

"That's better. Ye've paid me a retainer and I'm bound to give ye advice. If ye take it, ye may turn out an honest man. Go and bring Mr. Ray back with ye."

Mike went out, and O'Rourke leaned back

and enjoyed a hearty but silent laugh till he heard the outer door close. Then he went into the outer office, and found Roberts already struggling into his overcoat, to whom he said approvingly:

"Good boy, Roberts. Ye'll make yer mark yet, me boy. Yes; follow him to the train, but don't let him see ye. There's a good-sized African in the fence."

And Robert, who had heard all that was going on in the inner office, through a speaking-tube expressly arranged for that purpose, put up his coat-collar, sallied out into the raw February night, and followed Red Mike to the station to see if he would try to play false.

But the tramp was too thoroughly cowed to think of any such thing. Not only the idea of the police had frightened him, but O'Rourke's mysterious threat to have him roasted over a fire.

Mike had once been initiated into one of the secret societies of the tramps, and had seen the punishment inflicted by them on an offender against their laws, so that he was fully prepared to believe that a man who held intimate relations with every criminal in the West, could set them all to hunting any unfortunate who might incur his wrath.

It was in this frame of mind that he resolved to obey his orders strictly, and Roberts was relieved to see that he would have no trouble in watching him.

Mike went to the station, sat down in the waiting-room, and when the eight o'clock train came in, Roberts saw him peer about among the passengers till he found John Ray, whom he at once accosted with the greeting:

"Good-evening, boss; Lawyer O'Rourke is a-waitin' fur ye at his office."

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. FLYNN'S BOARDERS.

JOHN RAY had come to Chicago with no fixed plan of action except to find and arrest Stover, and in some way to have an interview with Edith Wallis. How he would do either he did not see clearly; but he trusted to his own wits to take advantage of circumstances; and he had in his favor the knowledge that the Diamond Car Company was not in a prosperous condition for some reason or another.

He had intended to enter the city quietly, and take time before deciding upon his plan of action; but his ideas were all upset, the moment he arrived, by the sudden apparition of Red Mike, whom he at first failed to recognize in his new clothes, though the face seemed familiar to him.

"Good-evenin', boss," was the tramp's hoarse salutation. "Lawyer O'Rouke's a-waitin' fur ye at his office."

Had Mike mentioned any other name John would have taken him for a confidence man, and made him no answer; but the salutation made him stop and inspect Mike closely, asking:

"Who are you?"

"I was sent arter ye from Lawyer O'Rourke's office, boss," said Mike, affably. "Him and me's old pals. You're Mr. Ray, ain't you?"

John looked at him suspiciously.

"Have you been long with Mr. O'Rourke, my friend?" he asked. "I don't remember your face in his office."

"I ain't been there long," replied Mike, evasively; "but he wants ter see yer, and he told me so."

"Where is his office?" asked John, and as Mike gave the street and number, the young man observed:

"Very well; go ahead. I'll come."

"Sba'n't I carry yer bag fer ye?" Mike asked, insinuatingly.

"No. I can carry it myself. Go on."

John was disposed to be suspicious, and his bag contained all his worldly wealth, including his shares of Emerald Company stock, worth over fifty thousand dollars.

Mike favored the bag with a keen glance, as if he suspected the secret; but made no reply, and walked on, John following.

Arrived in the street, the young man was about to call a hack, when Mike shambled up to him with the remark:

"It ain't far, boss, and I'd jest as lief carry the bag fer ye."

Something in the tones of his voice and his furtive manner caused a flash of recollection to come over John, and he said, suddenly:

"Who are you? What's your name?"

"My name?" echoed Mike. "Why, I thought you knew me, boss."

"So I do, or I think I do. What is your name? I'll find if you are lying to me."

"Lynin'!" echoed Mike, with a scowl. "Say, boss, d'you know lynin's a fightin' word?"

"I'm aware of it," returned John, coolly putting one hand into his overcoat pocket. "What's your name? I'll see whether to use the word or not. What's your name?"

"I'm Mike Marble," returned the tramp, after a short pause, in which he had decided that it was best not to swerve from the truth.

"Exactly; I thought I remembered you. You don't belong to O'Rourke's office. You're a fraud. Get away from me or you'll have trouble, my friend."

And he was again about entering the hack when Mike cried earnestly:

"Deed, and it's God's truth, boss. He did send for ye, and he'll be mad as blazes if I go back without ye."

"Then he can stay mad," said John, shortly. "I don't believe you've anything to do with him, so clear out."

Then he entered the hack and was driven to a hotel, while Mike, after vainly imprecating all sorts of evils on the retiring hack, betook himself to O'Rourke's office, and burst in on the lawyer with the eager apology:

"I couldn't help it, boss; 'deed I couldn't, but he wouldn't believe I came from ye, and he wouldn't come."

"Where has he gone?" inquired O'Rourke, eying him in the searching way with which he was wont to overawe those clients who hesitated to tell him all.

"Deed, and I don't know, boss," was the confused reply. "He driv away in a hack, and I—"

"And you call yourself a man fit to send on an errand," returned O'Rourke, scornfully. "There's no danger in you. Sit down there, till I'm ready to talk to you. I'm busy now."

And he went on writing, the clerks scratching away with their pens in the same dead silence, till the door opened and Mr. Roberts came in, took off his overcoat and went to his desk as if nothing unusual had occurred; while Mike, who was much impressed with everything about him, sat staring vaguely, first at one, then the other, till O'Rourke suddenly threw down his pen and said:

"Mr. Roberts."

"Sir?"

The alert chief clerk came to the table, and a look passed between him and his chief which showed that they understood each other too well for words to be needed, though O'Rourke asked:

"Well, did you see the party I told you to find?"

"Yes, sir. He's here."

And Roberts took from his vest-pocket a paper, on which was written in pencil the name:

"JOHN RICHARDS.

"New York."

"Room 87, Appomattox House."

O'Rourke nodded and handed Roberts a paper, saying:

"I want three copies to-morrow, before ten, for use in court. Did the party see our friend with the rufous locks?"

"Yes, sir. He was all right. The party wouldn't speak to him, and it seemed to demoralize our friend."

"Thank you; that'll do."

And Mike, to whom all this was so much Greek, had no conception that the lawyer had any reference to him, till O'Rourke turned on him with the remark in a gruff tone:

"You may thank your stars you didn't lie to me, me friend. Now you go home, and report to me to-morrow at nine. Hark ye; ye'll see this Percy, won't ye? Well, if ye do, tell him you've seen yer man, and you'll have him in a day or two. Keep him amused and report to me what he says. D'ye see?"

"Yes, boss," answered Mike, humbly.

"And d'ye mind this? If ye behave as I want ye, I'll engage ye'll get more out of this business than if ye'd staid on the other side."

"Yes, boss."

Mike's eyes sparkled, but he hesitated.

"How—how much, boss?" he asked, at last, in a low tone.

"That depends on how ye behave. It'll not be less than Percy promised ye, and it may be double."

Mike's face cleared up at once.

"On them terms I'll do anythin', boss."

He was about to leave the office, when O'Rourke added:

"Stop! A word more."

Mike came back, and O'Rourke held up his finger:

"If ye try to play tricks, ye'll have the whole rogue's gallery after ye. D'ye mind that now? Every man ye'll meet is a spy on ye, and ye can't escape."

Mike shuddered slightly as he replied:

"I won't play no tricks, boss."

"See ye don't. Where are ye goin' now?"

Mike hesitated.

"To a friend's house."

"What's his name?"

"Thomas Brown, sir."

"Where does he live?"

"In—in Wabash avenue," said Mike, but his eyes fell as he spoke, and the lawyer knew he was lying.

"Ah, very well," he replied. "Ye can go there now, Mike, and I'll send a clerk to see the gentleman in the morning."

Mike bobbed his head, and shambled out of the office, when O'Rourke said in answer to an inquiring glance from Roberts:

"Certainly. We need to know all we can about that fellow. I'll wait till ye come back."

Mr. Roberts had on his hat and his overcoat in a twinkle and darted out, while O'Rourke

kept on at his writing as if nothing had occurred.

In about half an hour the chief clerk came back quietly, and laid a piece of paper on the table, then went to his desk and resumed his copying.

O'Rourke looked at the paper, on which was written only:

"Tim Flynn's."

The words seemed to give him all the information he needed, for he quietly tore up the paper, wrote a little more, and finally said:

"Mr. Roberts, ye can shut up as soon as those papers are copied. I'm going."

"Very good, sir," was all that Roberts said, and then his chief went away, when an immediate revolution took place in the office.

The silent clerks became talkative, and a Babel of noise arose, as they began to discuss the various incidents of the day's business, after the fashion of all clerks, with little interest in the actors, but a keen eye to the ludicrous aspects of each case.

Meanwhile the head of the establishment, as soon as he left the office, took his way to the very bar-room where Mike had imbibed so freely, and strolled in with a nod to the landlord, who at once became obsequiously familiar.

"Glad to see you, counselor. What'll you have? Got some fine old rye—"

"Oh, just a cigar, Tim, that's all. How's business?" replied O'Rourke, indifferently, glancing round the bar-room, which was full of hard-looking characters, who all nodded respectfully to him whenever they could catch his eye, seeming to think it an honor to be noticed.

"Business is a-boomin'. How d'yer like 'em—strong?" replied Tim.

"Strong, of course. No trouble, lately, Tim, or I should have heard of it!"

"No, sir, thanks to you, counselor. I take mighty good keer of myself sence that little af-fair—eh, counselor? It paid you well, didn't it?"

"And didn't it pay you, too?" asked the lawyer, as he lighted his cigar. "Bedad, it was worth the money, gittin' ye out of that scrape, me friend. Tin years in the stone-jug is worth a thousand dollars at the l'aste, and ye only paid—"

"All I had, counselor, all I had, and the business ain't b'en what it used to—"

"I thought ye said it was booming, Tim?"

Tim coughed delicately.

"Well—that is—to what it was last week; but it ain't never b'en what it was afore the cops dropped on me. As soon as ever I kin, counselor, I'll come round and see ye—"

O'Rourke interrupted him by waving his hand. He had defended the ingenuous Tim, some months before, in connection with the reception of stolen property, and Tim still owed him five hundred dollars on a note of hand; so that O'Rourke, who was generally careless in money matters, from the ease with which he earned a living, knew he had the landlord in his power.

"I didn't come after that, Tim," he said, to the intense relief of Flynn, who ejaculated:

"God bless you, counselor, but you're the real gentleman, you are. Try a little of the rye!"

"I'll tr' a thimbleful, if ye'll join 'me," said O'Rourke, who had come after information, and knew how to get it.

Tim grinned affably: pushed his guest the bottle, and drank a deep draught when his turn came, while O'Rourke merely wetted his lips, after pretending to drink, and dropped his liquor into the spittoon by the bar, ejaculating:

"That's good, Tim, good. Now you must take one with me."

And Tim did so, O'Rourke watching to see that he took a *bona fide* swallow, while his own drink went after the first, as he observed:

"Got any boarders, Tim?"

Tim Flynn grimed, for his tongue had been loosened by the drinks.

"Ay, ay, counselor, several. You'll see 'em all in good time. I'll give yer a recommend, you kin bet."

"Thank you, Tim. I got in one to-day on your recommendation; a fellow called Marble."

He watched Tim as he spoke, and saw that the landlord's face twitched slightly at the name, so he went on:

"I don't see him here."

Tim winked slyly, and seemed as if about to speak, but changed his mind, and O'Rourke remarked:

"It's just about time to take another taste of the rye, Tim. Here, take it out of that, with the other one."

And he threw down a five-dollar bill, at sight of which Tim's face relaxed, and he filled the glasses again, saying:

"Yer good health, counselor."

The third glass evidently removed all his scruples; for he said in a low voice as he shoved over the lawyer's change:

"I'm glad you've come, counselor. That 'ere Marble, he's a beat. He ain't no reg'lar crook, he ain't; and I'm afraid he's goin' to get us all into a hole."

"In hand?"

"Yes, counselor."

"What's the matter?"

"Would you believe it, Mr. O'Rourke, there's a durned fool in this city is a-trustin' this same Marble to steer him out of trouble; he's got a crook from the East in this house, a-hidin' from the cops. It's jest disgustin', that's what it is."

"What's disgusting, Tim?"

"To think he should trust that galoot. Don't know no more 'bout business than a babby. Goin' bout in new clo'es, a-bringin' suspicion on a honest man tryin' to make a honest livin'. Why—"

He lowered his voice to a whisper:

"If you'll b'lieve me, there's b'en three cops in here this very evenin' all ownin' to him swag-erin' 'round and layin' loose drunk."

"He's not drunk? He wasn't, at my office."

"Not to-night; but he was in the mornin', and had to sleep it off."

"Where is he now?"

Tim pointed over his shoulder.

"I've got him up there. I'm goin' to make what I kin outer the gang."

"Ah, yes; they're quite a nice lot. Let me see; there are five of them, are there not?"

This was a feeler; for O'Rourke did not know yet of anything more than one; but Tim swallowed the bait innocently.

"Oh, no; only three, and the third feller's a his flyer."

"Ah, yes. Do you know who he is?"

Tim shook his head.

"Wish I did. I'll find out for yer."

"No importance. Who's the other man that stops here?"

"I d'no'. But tell yer what it is—he looks to me like a man what's shot a feller, and run fur it. He's a little cuss, and looks skeered like."

"Has he a counsel?"

"No, sir; but I'll see he don't get any but you, counselor. I know my biz."

"That's all very well, me friend, but I'm not touting for business, ye know. What sort of a looking man is he?"

"Little undersized cuss, small eyes, set close together. Don't look like a reg'lar crook. Too sly."

O'Rourke smiled.

"Ye're quite an obsirver, Tim."

"Orter be. See'd enough on 'em."

"And your friend Marble is up-stairs, is he?"

Tim, whose eyes were roving over the room, suddenly muttered, without moving his lips:

"There he is now, coming for a drink."

This was one of Tim's little accomplishments, imitated from traveling ventriloquists, and sometimes standing him in good stead, as in the present instance; for O'Rourke, who understood him perfectly, filled up a glass as if he were taking a last drink, and turned round, just as Red Mike came up to the bar.

The ex-tramp had his hat pulled down over his eyes, and did not notice O'Rourke, as he slapped the bar, saying:

"Come, Tim, come. I'm awful dry. Give me a bottle to take up-stairs."

Tim handed out a bottle, and Mike pulled out what the lawyer's quick eye saw to be a gold certificate from his pocket, into which he hastily shoved it back, substituting a five-dollar bill, with which he paid for the whisky, and shambled away, never looking up at any one, and not beeding O'Rourke.

"That'll keep him still till morning," remarked Tim, as Marble disappeared. "He's a nice duck, he is, to be trusted with anything. Why, a green cop, jest app'nted, couldn't help seein' through him."

O'Rourke made no answer, but pulled reflectively at his cigar, and presently observed to the landlord:

"I'll be going now, Tim. If ye have any trouble, ye know where to come."

"Indeed, I do," replied Tim, and he was so particular to do honor to his guest that he saw him to the door himself, and then went back to his bar, muttering:

"The counselor's a gentleman. He never wants to know no man's biz an' furder'n to take keer of him; and I've got to be keerful, or that red-headed galoot will get us all into a hole. Reckon I'll go and have a look at him."

He called the ever-useful Jossie to tend the bar, and went up-stairs to the room where he suspected his guest to be, rather than in his own sleeping apartment.

Sure enough, when he came to the dark room, he heard the sound of some one singing in a crooning way, and found Mike Marble and the little stranger together, the now partly inebriated Michael trolling in lugubrious tones the pathetic and inspiring ballad of "Cooper and Donnelly," the little stranger nodding his head in time and holding onto the bottle, from which his flushed face announced that he had been imbibing liberally.

As Tim entered, Red Mike was trolling out the renowned lines:

"Then up steps Mrs. Kelly, and takes Donnelly by the hand;
'On you she says, 'brave Donnelly, I've wagered house and land.
For the honor of old Ireland don't let me lose, this day,
But conquer this bold Englishman, and down him in the fray.'

Then Donnelly got his second wind and went at it again, And basted Cooper right and left, upon the bloody plain; And gave him one tremenjous blow, alongside of the jaw, That worsted Cooper so that he could come to time no more."

"Rah for Donnelly!" hiccupped the little man, waving the bottle. "That's a stavin' song, Mike."

Then, as he saw Tim in the doorway, gazing sternly at him, he ejaculated:

"What'n thunder's matter?"

"The matter is that if you two don't stop yer darnation noise, the cops'll be in on yer," roared Tim.

"Let 'em hear us," cried the little man, waving the bottle. "What do we care for 'em; hey, Mike? I've got slathers of money, and nothing to do with it. Look here, landlord. Hooray! Here's to ye, and bad luck to the cops!"

And he took a deep swig from the bottle, Tim watching him all the while, for the landlord had not come up for nothing.

"Say!" inquired Flynn, as the little man put the bottle on his knee, "do you intend to keep that bottle all night? There's Mike hasn't had a drop all day."

The little man tried to get up, and sat down suddenly again, remarking:

"Landlord, you're a gentleman, a real gentleman. Mr. Marble is another. Here, Mike, take hold. I'm—I'm not quite well. Guess I'll take a little nap."

Tim saw that he would soon be dead drunk, while Mike Marble was doing his best to follow suit, so the landlord asked, insinuatingly:

"Don't you want to leave any message when the gentleman calls to morrow?"

"What gentleman?" asked the little man, stupidly. "You mean Percy?"

"Of course," replied Tim, delighted to have obtained the name so easily. "What shall I say to him when he comes in the morning?"

The little man had curled himself up on the bed and was rolling his head to and fro, but as Tim repeated the question, he snapped out:

"Oh, tell'm to go to blazes."

And with that fell asleep, while Mike Marble sucked away at the bottle, already half-empty, and said, in a pitying way:

"Pore little cuss! he ain't used to it. But he's got slathers of rocks, Tim. Ef you don't believe it, jest go through his pockets."

The landlord's eyes glittered, for avarice was his ruling passion; but, as he looked at Mike, he thought to himself:

"It wouldn't do to trust him. I'll get him dead drunk before I do anything. It will take another bottle of whisky; but it's worth the expense."

CHAPTER XXIII.

COUNSELOR AND CLIENTS.

WHEN Mr. O'Rourke left the classic precincts of Mr. Flynn's select and retired boarding-house, he glanced keenly up and down the shabby street in which it was located, and observed a policeman on the opposite side of the street, as he had more than half expected to find one.

The counselor's acquaintance in the ranks of the "force" was nearly as large as among the "crooked men" of the city, so he had no hesitation in going over to the guardian of the night, and accosting him with the familiar query:

"Well, Smithie, how goes it?"

"Oh, pretty well, counselor. Good-evening," was the rather reserved reply, and the lawyer continued:

"On duty, eh, Smithie?"

"None of your business, counselor," returned Smithie, shortly, at which O'Rourke laughed, saying:

"Ab, I thought so. Much obliged for the information, my friend."

Smithie turned his back on him, and began to whistle. He had suffered at the hands of O'Rourke in a cross-examination in court only the day before, and felt rather sore about it; otherwise he would have been civil, and O'Rourke knew the cause of his gruffness.

"Do you ever drink, Smithie?" he inquired, slyly, at which the man with the club stopped whistling, and O'Rourke pursued, sweetly:

"Ye shouldn't bear malice, me friend. Ye know I am an officer of the court as well as yourself, and have to do me duty to me clients."

"But you needn't go to callin' an honest man names, and makin' game of him afore a lot of galoots on the jury," retorted Smithie, sulkily. "Ef you an' me warn't on duty I'd 'a' whipped you or you'd 'a' whipped me fur what you said, counselor."

"Ah, well, that's all over, Smithie," the lawyer returned, soothingly. "Come round to Charley Doran's and take a hot rum to drown it."

Smithie weakened perceptibly.

"I don't take no stock in hot rums," he answered, reluctantly; "but if it was a hot Scotch now, with a bit of peel in it, I ain't care—"

"Ye shall have it, if ye will spoil yer digestion with such stuff," O'Rourke interrupted. "Come along."

He had found already what he wanted to know. The policeman had not been detailed to watch Tim Flynn's house in particular, or he would not have left his post.

As they went down the street toward the bar-room for which they were bound, the lawyer observed, carelessly:

"Tim Flynn's been pretty quiet lately, I suppose."

"Yes. Pretty quiet."

"No reports against him? I'm interested in keeping him straight, you know, because he owes me money yet."

"Then you'd best tell him, as a friend, not to tryin' to rope in men like young Steve Percy," returned Smithie. "You've been a friend of mine, counselor, if you did handle me rough yesterday, so I'll tell you. I don't want to see you lose no money; but we're jest layin' fur Tim, and some night we'll come down on him and make a haul."

"Ah! so you think he's running—"

"A skin game. That's jest it. There was a feller went in yesterday as hain't come out yet, and I'm blamed if some of the men didn't see young Steve Percy in with him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Not that I b'lieve it. Reckon it's only a stall. What'd a millionaire like him be doin' in there? He don't want to play no keno outside, when he's got a house of his own."

"Well, never mind him. Here's Charley Doran's. Come into the back room."

And the lawyer took in the policeman by the private way, plied him with "hot Scotch," and pumped him dry of all he knew on the subject of Tim Flynn, which proved to be only the fact that Tim was under police surveillance again, was a suspicious person.

This much obtained, O'Rourke left his brass-buttoned friend, restored to amity, and betook himself to the Appomattox House, where he looked over the register and asked, pausing at a name:

"Is Mr. Richards in his room?"

"Guess so," returned the night clerk, indifferently. "Go up if you want to, counselor. Third flight back. Number 87."

O'Rourke did as he was told, and soon knocked at the door of No. 87, which was opened to him by John Ray in person, who nodded silently, grasped his hand, and pulled him in, saying, in a low tone:

"I was coming to see you in the morning. But how did you know I was here?"

"My man told me. Didn't he see ye at the station, and tell ye I waited for ye?"

John hesitated slightly.

"A man came—that is—a tramp I once had trouble with—but I couldn't believe you really sent him. I thought he was trying to trick me."

"Ye'll do well, when I send ye messages in future to trust me messengers," said O'Rourke, rather dryly. "If I hadn't been a better friend than ye deserve, I'd not have come this blessed night to ye."

"But how did you find me? I'm not here under my own name."

"I know it. What's your trouble? Have ye been robbing a bank?"

"Nothing, on my honor. I am in no trouble, I assure you."

"Then why are ye creeping into Chicago like a thief under a false name? My man followed ye, and saw ye write in the register."

"Your man? Not he. I watched for him, and if he'd followed me I should have known he was straight, but he didn't."

"Not that man. I keep more than one on my errands. Anyway, ye're here now. What d'ye want?"

"To catch a thief."

"Who's the thief?"

"The same man that gave away Schmidt's offer to old Wallis, two years ago."

"Man?" echoed O'Rourke, as if puzzled. "Why, that was a woman, ye ignoramus, or—No, no, I'm thinking of something else. 'Twas a woman gave it away to you, and ye didn't know enough to make hay while the sun shone. Go on."

His words seemed to puzzle John.

"What do you mean by a woman? Whom are you talking about?"

"Oh, no one, no one," replied O'Rourke, evasively. "Who's your thief? What's his name?"

"His name's Stover. A small man with little eyes and a foxy face. He's stolen ten thousand dollars, and run away to Percy, with the secrets of our company."

"To Percy? How d'ye know?"

John gave him a short history of the whole affair, and O'Rourke listened attentively.

When the young man had finished, the lawyer asked:

"Well, what'll ye do? What d'ye want to do about it?"

"I want to catch Stover, and make him disgorge!"

"That's easy enough. And then?"

John hesitated a little.

"And then. Why, I want—"

"What d'ye want?"

"I want to—to see—Miss Wallis."

"And why?" asked the lawyer, dryly.

"I don't know," answered John.

"Neither do I. Ye should have made hay while the sun shone. Now she's going to be married to Percy."

John ground his teeth.

"So it said in the paper; but I didn't believe it."

"Of course ye didn't. D'ye know why?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Because ye didn't want to believe it. Oh, there's a vast d'ale of human nature in ye yet, John?"

"Then you think it's true?"

"Of course it is. Haven't they been at the new house, night and day, he and the ould gentleman?"

"Ah! but not she! She has not been there to help them?"

"Devil blame her. She's more sinse than you have."

"What do you mean?"

"I m'ane that you couldn't read her when ye had the opportunity; but she can read you like a book. She's been putting off things in the hope that ye'd come back for her, and ye've come, if ye haven't come too late."

John began to get excited.

"What? then do you think that I have a chance to win that peerless being?"

"Peerless being? John Ray, me boy, when ye've been married as long as I have, had luck to me, ye'll find that women are all alike. They don't have any peerless beings among them. Ye have a chance, if ye know how to take it, and don't throw it away, like ye did before."

John looked more and more excited and eager as he burst out:

"O'Rourke, you're the first and best friend I ever had. You gave me my first advice, and by following it, I rose from a plodding country boy to a competence. Now will you advise me on my future? for, I admit, I'm in a serious quandary. I don't know what to do."

"I'll not do anything till ye ring for some cigars and something to drink."

And he would not say a word till a table was spread, and they were both smoking quietly, while John was becoming calmed down from the state of nervous excitement in which O'Rourke had seen him to be.

Then the lawyer said, between puffs of his cigar:

"Now, me old pupil, fire away. Tell me the whole story. First, ye want to marry Edith Wallis; is that it?"

John sighed.

"Ah, I fear that's impossible."

"And why?"

"She's too far above me."

"Above ye? Iho! one would think ye were a poor devil of an Irishman in his own country. Don't ye know that one man's as good as another in this country, ye omadhaun?"

John sighed more deeply than before.

"Yes, as good as another man, but not a lady. Ah, no one could equal her."

"That's what they all say before they're married. Now tell me what's the maxim I gave ye when ye were a boy that's helped ye most?"

John reflected a moment.

"You told me that the difference in men lay in knowledge, and that one man was as good as another. I've found the first only partially true. The great difference between men in our country seems to be money, and that is all that people value."

"You're right. But what gets money?"

"Knowledge and industry; but it comes so slowly," said John, rather sadly. "I'm sure I've worked hard enough; but my whole store does not amount to more than one per cent. of her fortune."

"And you want to make money then? Is that it, John?"

"I do. I want to make my fortune equal to hers, so that I can go to her and say that I am no fortune-hunter."

"I see. You want to be as good as the lady's money, not counting the lady at all."

"No, no; I don't mean that—"

"Ye do. Ye'll not contradict me. Now listen to me, John Ray. How old are ye to-day?"

"Twenty-seven."

And John sighed.

"What are ye sighing about?"

"To think that I'm as old as I am, and yet haven't made a fortune."

"Hum! Is that it? What would ye have? D'ye want some one to die and leave ye a million?"

"No. I want to make it myself."

"Ye do. Did ye ever hear of a man of twenty-seven that had made a million of dollars himself?"

John looked thoughtful.

"No, I can't say I have; but then look at Mr. Wallis. He was a carpenter, and he's worth—"

"D'ye know how much?"

"No, but it must be several millions at least."

"Well, I'll tell ye just how much he's worth, John," said the lawyer, slowly. "I've had occasion to look into his affairs lately for a client of mine, a lady; and he's worth just about ten thousand dollars less than nothing at all."

John turned pale with excitement.

"What? Do you mean he's ruined?"

"I said no such thing. But if his creditors choose to sell him up, he won't have a cent to his name."

"And who are they?"

"Gentlemen that won't press him, for a very good reason." They want his vote. He's a senator, and that's worth enough to put him on his feet, if it's well used."

John looked blankly at the lawyer.

"Then what am I to do? Oh, I'm so glad he's no richer than I am, for now I can go to her and say—"

"Say what?" asked O'Rourke, as the young man hesitated.

"Say to her: 'My fortune is equal to yours now, therefore I can ask you to be my wife.'"

"Ye'd say that; would ye?"

"Certainly."

"And ye'd be a regular ass, John, a long-eared, braying Neddy, so ye would. D'ye know what she'd tell ye?"

"What?"

"She'd tell ye ye'd made a little mistake, and that she was engaged to Mr. Percy."

"Why? Do you mean that she loves that contemptible, cowardly—"

"Chut, chut! That'll do, I know ye hate him, but it's bad taste to call him names. He's your rival, and he's worth money if ould Wallis isn't."

"And you mean then that—"

"That he's Wallis's principal creditor, me brave boy, and that ye've got to be as rich as he is to fight him. Besides, the lady was brought up in luxury, and ye can't offer her a home such as she's used to, while Mr. Percy can do just that same."

John's countenance fell.

"You don't offer much encouragement to a man."

"Ye asked for advice. I'm giving it. I tell ye, ye've one chance out of a hundred to win the lady from Percy. D'ye want to do it or not?"

"I do, I do, I do," said John, earnestly.

"That's enough. Now for me advice. Ye've only one way to get her."

"And that is?"

"To make a fortune. Are ye willing to risk everything ye've got?"

"Ten times over. I'm willing to risk anything, for I feel that I might as well die if I lose her."

"So ye said before. Now then, I'll tell ye. There's only one way to make money quickly in any country."

"And that is?"

"To take risks and gamble. I see you start at the word. Very well. I don't want to tempt ye. How much have ye to lose, in cash?"

"Fifty-thousand dollars."

O'Rourke grinned.

"And ye were grumbling just now at your poverty. D'ye know how much old Percy had at your age?"

"No. How much?"

"Devil a cent. He was forty before he got a fair hold on the market, and it took him nearly thirty years more to make what he did. Now we'll set in for serious talk, and, mind ye, not a word to a soul. I see a way out of all this, John Ray, that will end in making both our fortunes, and if ye take it and win the day, I'll go bail the lady'll have ye."

They settled down, as the lawyer produced some papers and went into some intricate calculations. When they separated, O'Rourke's watch pointed to the hour of three in the morning, and his last words to John were:

"If we can do it, ye see where Percy will be, and ye'll be master of the situation."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE STOCK MARKET.

SENATOR WALLIS was seated in his library one morning, thoughtfully smoking a cigar, and brooding over something, when he heard a ring at the bell, and the black waiter brought in a card on a salver.

The card contained the name:

MR. JOHN RICHARDS,

"New York."

"Richards, Richards?" repeated the senator, thoughtfully. "Don't know him. What does he want?"

"Business, sab. Gentleman said it was 'bout stocks, sah."

The senator pricked up his ears.

"Stocks, eh? Tell him to come in."

vent the senator from being as polite as possible to the stranger, for the latter had a certain something about him that bespoke *money*.

The senator greeted him with his blandest smile, and inquired:

"And how can I be of service to you, to-day, my dear sir?"

The stranger bobbed his head in a stiff, awkward salutation, responding, in a nasal sort of way:

"How do, how do, senator? Heard you were in; thought I'd call. I'm in the railroad line myself. Had some little experience in building sleepers, too. How d'ye quote your stock, now? I might invest, if I got it cheap."

The senator hummed, and seemed to be considering before he answered:

"Well, now, as a matter of fact, I don't know there's any on the market—"

"True, true. Noticed that. What's the matter? Won't the stock board touch it?" queried the stranger sharply.

Wallis drew up stiffly.

"Not touch it, indeed. They couldn't get it. The stock's all in a few hands."

"I know, I know. Heard it all before. I'm an old operator, Wallis. Can't come it over me. I want two thousand shares, and I'm offered them at sixteen. I'll give you fifteen and a half for all you've got, and pay cash."

The stranger spoke in a hard, decided way; and Wallis saw that he had no fool to deal with; but he laughed scornfully as he retorted:

"Fifteen and a half! Nonsense. I can sell them in open market at thirty-five to-day."

"Hum! Pretty choice stock to keep for an investment, at thirty-five. Hasn't paid a dividend for two years."

"How do you know, sir?"

"Oh, I know, I watch these things. You won't take fifteen and a half? Well, good-morning. If you conclude to take my offer, drop me a line at the Appomattox House, room 87. There: I've written it out on the card. Good-day."

And the stranger was walking out, when Wallis observed:

"Don't be in such a hurry. I'll sell you what you want at thirty-five, if you like—that is, not two thousand shares, you know. I've only eighteen hundred at present—"

"Yes, I know. Percy owns the rest. Three thousand in all. You hold the controlling interest. I understand. No. I can't stop. Came to buy at my own price. Don't want to sell? Good-day."

And he was hurrying off, when the old senator called out:

"Come, I don't want to be mean, and I do want to get out of this; I'll sell you at twenty-five."

"Can't be done. Go to Percy," replied the old gentleman in green goggles. "No use. Not a cent over fifteen and a half. I'll try in the market to-morrow."

And with that he really was off, and the senator saw him going down the street, looking shabbier than ever, in the open air, while old Wallis muttered:

"Strange! Very strange! The first offer for our stock in a year. What does it mean? If I could sell out at thirty-five, I might make a good thing yet, and pay off Percy. I believe I'll try the market."

Diamond Car Stock had not been on the market for over a year; since Percy had been president. There had been no dividend at the close of the previous year, but instead of it a call on the stockholders, to supply losses caused by extravagant purchases, and the result had been a panic, with every one wanting to sell, and no one to buy; the stock falling in three days to a very low price, at which Percy had bought in all there was to sell, to the amount of twelve hundred shares. The remainder, in Senator Wallis's hands, had been quoted at a hundred and fifty-seven when he went to Europe, and it was only on his return that he had found, from the shrinkage of the market, that his wealth had been lessened to about one-eighth of what it had been when he went away, with absolutely no sale for what he had left.

If it not been for his real estate, he would have fared badly; and what made matters more perplexing was that the bills on the new house kept coming in every day, and he had to provide means for meeting them, with the result that he fell more and more into Percy's power, having, at the time that Mr. Richards came to him, a debt of fifty thousand dollars, secured on notes that were to come due in a few days, and all his available means exhausted.

It was under these circumstances that the senator thoughtfully went down to his broker's, and told him to put out a few shares on the market, and see if he could sell them at thirty-five.

The broker promised to try, and the senator went to the stock board that afternoon, to see the operation.

The president called over the list till he came to "Diamond Car," and was passing over it as unworthy of any attention, when a broker jumped up and yelled:

"I'll give fourteen and three-eighths for three thousand Diamond Car."

There was a hush at this for a moment, and then a number of brokers jumped up and began to bid up the stock till it reached eighteen, when the first broker shouted:

"I'll sell twelve hundred Diamond at fourteen and a half, ten days buyer."

The senator nodded to his own broker, who lustily shouted:

"SOLD!"

Then the hubbub quieted, and the senator began to investigate. He knew the man who had sold the stock short to be an agent of Stephen Percy, and wondered what that gentleman could mean by selling at such a low price.

But he could get no satisfaction out of the broker beyond:

"It's sold, senator; and if you want to pay the money you can have it."

So the senator went away to the Appomattox House, thinking to himself:

"I shall be clear of all liability, and have ten thousand dollars cash in pocket. The crash must come for me very soon, and as long as I am clear of my stock I am free of Percy. He can't impound the money."

He sent up his card to room 87, and was at once sent down a message:

"Mr. Richards was too ill to see any one; but if the gentleman would call on Mr. O'Rourke at No. 1247 Madison Place, he could perform his business."

And the senator, used as he was to seeing every one bow at his feet, had to do as he was told, or lose the money, for which, at that moment, he had a great longing.

He knew O'Rourke by reputation only, and was mortified to find that his name produced no impression when it was announced in the office, for he was actually kept waiting for twenty minutes before O'Rourke would see him, and then was greeted curtly with:

"Well, have ye brought the certificates?"

"Yes," said the senator stiffly. "It's a low price, but I'll take it."

"Not so low as it's gone since," said the lawyer, dryly. "We lose eighteen hundred dollars on the transaction. Will ye sell the twelve hundred ye bought to-day at the same price?"

"Yes," said the senator, eagerly.

"Then go and get them. No use making two bites of a cherry," was the reply.

"I haven't got them," answered Wallis, rather crestfallen. "I can get them to-day. Here's the eighteen hundred."

"All right—eighteen hundred, at fifteen and half, is twenty-seven thousand nine hundred. Mr. Roberts, count those certificates, write out a receipt, and give the gentleman his check. Good-day."

And O'Rourke, who was in the inner office, resumed his writing as if the once proud millionaire had been a beggar, while Wallis took his check as quietly as if he were used to the way he was being treated, and went off.

He proceeded straight to the bank and drew the money, then went to Percy's broker, paid for his stocks there, and came back to O'Rourke's office, where he received another sum which made him smile as he put it in his pocket, remarking:

"Well, I suppose you know your own business best, but I hope you'll be able to sell that stock for what you gave for it."

"Never fear," answered O'Rourke, quietly. "We know what we're about, and in the mean time I've a little business proposition to make to ye."

He rose and shut the door, and the old senator, who felt very different now that he had nearly fifty thousand dollars in his pocket, chuckled as he said:

"Very good, very good. I'm always open for business. What is it?"

O'Rourke came and sat down opposite to him, and said, in a low voice:

"What would ye say to taking the post of superintendent of the works and coming down to hard-pan at once, senator?"

"Doing what?" asked Wallis, puzzled.

"Coming down to hard-pan, and making the Diamond stock what it used to be. My client now represents the company, and owns all the stock, and surely ye've got enough cars and plant in the factory to sell for more than we gave for it."

The senator grinned.

Now that he was out of the trouble, he had the propensity very common among business men, to decry the bargain that his opponents had made, and insist that he had overreached them.

"Yes," he replied, "there's half a million of plant and another half-million in rolling-stock, but there are attachments to cover it all."

"All but the good will and the contract with the railroads," said O'Rourke, keenly. "Ye forget that."

The senator sneered.

"Much that will amount to. You don't know that young Percy as I do. He'll not extend them after the time expires, and then where will you be?"

O'Rourke waved his hand.

"Never mind. That's our business. So ye refuse the post of superintendent?"

"I didn't say so," returned Wallis, cautiously;

"but I must take time to think over it all. What do you intend to do?"

"To offer you what I've said."

"At how much salary?"

"What you offered John Ray two years ago, Mr. Wallis."

The senator started as if his face had been slapped, as he ejaculated:

"John Ray! What do you know about him? Is he in this?"

O'Rourke smiled. He saw that John's name had made the other uneasy.

"Yes, he's in it. Between you and me, we've purchased your company's rights for the Emerald men, and we're going to consolidate. If you want to take the superintendency, you can have it; but you'll have to fight Percy, at once."

The senator shook his head.

"I daren't do it. Give me time to think. See here. Who is that Richards?"

"Our General Agent."

"Couldn't he come to see me to-night, and I'll give you a positive answer."

"At what time?"

"Eight o'clock. After dinner."

"I'll tell him. Maybo he'll be there, if yo don't have Percy there."

"I'll see that he doesn't come. Good-day."

And the senator walked slowly out to his carriage—for he still had to keep up appearances and live at the rate of fifty thousand dollars a year—and drove home.

On reaching his house he shut himself up in his library, when a knock came at the door, and Mrs. Van Cott came in, and dropped a courtesy.

"What is it, Mrs. Van Cott?" he asked, and she answered with some hesitation:

"I don't exactly like to trouble you, sir, but the fact is Merrill & Titus's man has been here to-day, twice, for a check."

"Hum! the grocers?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long has their account been running, ma'am?"

"Over a year, sir."

"How much is it?"

Mrs. Van Cott silently extended the bill, and he started as he glanced at the footing of nearly two thousand dollars.

A deep frown crossed his brow as he said:

"That's a swindle, ma'am. It must be."

Mrs. Van Cott pursed up her lips, but said nothing, and he continued:

"Any more bills outstanding?"

"We've not paid any for some months, sir," answered Mrs. Van Cott, frigidly.

The senator glanced at the bill, frowned, bit his lips, threw down the account on the table, and finally said:

"Confound him! tell him I'll pay him tomorrow."

"I've told him so," replied the housekeeper, in the same way as before.

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said he would stay here till he saw you, if he had to wait all night."

"Confound his impudence! Didn't you tell the men to put him out?"

"No, sir."

"Why not, why not?"

"Because he told me that, if he was put out, an attachment was to be put on the house at once, sir. Those were his orders from his employers."

The senator took up the bill again and looked at it, as if trying to find some errors; but those uncompromising figures stared him in the face, and at last he said reluctantly:

"Tell him I'll pay him five hundred on account, and the rest next week. Here: take the money and see he receipts the bill, Mrs. Van Cott."

"Very well, sir."

And away went the housekeeper with a cheerful alacrity that showed how much she was relieved by receiving the money, while the senator thought:

"If they all come down on me in this way, I'll not have much left to start the world again."

Then he began to walk nervously up and down the room, thinking to himself over all his debts and perplexities, and how much he would have left if he fled the city; and finally sunk into a chair, his face buried in his hands, in which attitude his daughter Edith found him, as she came into the room, attired in costly raiment, and exclaimed, in surprise:

"Why, papa, what's the matter?"

The old man looked up, and his usually hard face softened as he looked at his beautiful daughter and said:

"My child, is it you?"

CHAPTER XXV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"YES, papa," returned the girl, softly; "it is I. What is the matter with you to-day? Are you ill? You look paler than usual. What has happened?"

She spoke kindly, yet there was a certain indefinable coldness in her tone, that the old man's senses, made keen by the blows of the last few months, detected, and he answered gloomily:

"Nothing, child, nothing that you need care

about—to-day. Don't exert yourself to sympathize with me. Go about your pleasures while you can."

Edith looked at him more carefully.

"There is something the matter, I'm sure," she said. "Don't be cross; but tell me what it is. Is it a headache?"

"No, child."

"A toothache?"

"It's no bodily pain, child."

"No bodily pain? Is it mental pain?"

"Yes, child, it is."

"Have I any share in it?"

"You are the whole of it."

"Have I done anything to hurt you?"

The senator hesitated.

He looked first at his child; then at the gorgeous room in which they stood, and for the first time in his life came into his head an idea of unmitigated and besotted selfishness, where Edith was concerned. Hitherto she had been his only sorrow in the thought of his ruin, and yet now, for the first time, came into his head the thought that he might be able to extricate himself from his trouble by her assistance or her sacrifice.

"Edith," he said, gloomily, "I've been good to you, haven't I?"

She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"In all things save one, father."

He frowned impatiently.

"Of course, of course. You wanted me to let you beggar yourself in name and position, by marrying that upstart—"

"Who sprung from the same place as my father," she retorted quickly. "Anything else you like, father, but don't call him an upstart."

The senator looked sullenly at the floor as he answered:

"I might have spared myself the trouble of appealing to your feelings had I known you were as obstinately set on my ruin as ever."

"On your ruin?"

Here her dark eyes opened wide.

"What do you mean, father?"

A knock at the door interrupted them, and Mrs. Van Cott came in and laid the bill on the table, saying:

"There is the receipt on account, sir. He grumbled a great deal, but went off."

Edith listened, and a change came into her face. She waited till the housekeeper had gone out, and then came close to her father, asking:

"Is it possible that you are in trouble for money?"

He gave a short, bitter laugh.

"It is not only possible, but it is very probable that before many months more I shall be sold out here."

She started and looked at him, but said nothing for some time, during which he sat with his eyes bent on the ground the picture of dejection. At last she drew a long breath, saying:

"Why didn't you tell me of this before? I ought to have known it."

"Because you never seemed to care, as long as you had money for your own pleasures," he retorted, bitterly. "You might have seen that I was uneasy."

"Yes; but I attributed that to another and different cause."

"What cause?"

She hesitated and colored slightly.

"Never mind now. I was mistaken. Now tell me the worst."

"The worst is, I'm ruined. Nothing can be worse than that," he said, bluntly.

"But I mean, tell me how you came to be in debt. I thought we were very rich. Surely you've spent thousands and thousands on that unlucky house."

"Yes," he retorted, bitterly, "there's where it went. I was bound to give my child the handsomest house in America, and it was all going well, till, in that unlucky hour, we went to Europe."

"But I did not want to go to Europe. You insisted on my going, and gave up the presidency of the company."

"Yes," he answered, gloomily. "That was my mistake. The salary would have made the difference between me and ruin. I trusted to Percy to give it up when I came back, but he broke faith with me. Ah, well, it's no use trying to think what I might have done. It's done now, and the question is whether you have enough love for me to save me."

He said this in the same gloomy way, glancing furtively up at her as he spoke, to see how she took it. She seemed to be both surprised and pleased at what he said.

"What! Can I save you? My dear, dear father, can you think I would hesitate to do it? What is it? To give up my property in the house? Will that pay your debts? Oh, how glad I am! I hate the very look of the place. I always have hated it. I'll give it up at once, as soon as I come of age, and that is only two months more."

"No, no, that would do no good," he said, still more gloomily. "My poor child, you don't understand me yet."

"Then what can I do? I thought the house was worth a million."

"So it is, with the lot, but it is not ours. I paid away all my ready money to those thieves

of mechanics, and they swallowed it all and have liers on the place for nearly all its value. The house will have to go, unless you save it."

"What do you mean by my saving it?" she interrupted, impatiently. "How can I save it, if it has to be sold?"

The old man looked embarrassed for a moment, and answered:

"Sit down, sit down. It requires some explanation. If you'll attend to me, I'll tell you the whole story."

She obeyed him, trembling slightly, and he went on, beginning in a low voice, with his eyes averted:

"I must go back to the time when you were a baby, Edith."

"Go on, sir. I'm listening."

"Your mother was a great friend of Mrs. Percy, Stephen's mother."

"Yes, sir."

"They both died in the same month, when Stephen was five years old and you only three weeks in the world. They were very much attached to each other—"

Here the old man seemed to be positively affected by some remembrance, for he stopped and gave a deep sigh.

Presently he resumed:

"You never knew your mother. Both she and Mrs. Percy were plain, quiet women, who worked their lives out to help their husbands, and we both toiled hard, with the one object of amassing wealth for our little ones. We fathers are apt to do that, and much thanks we get for it."

He glanced at her again to see how this artful appeal to her feelings succeeded, and had the satisfaction of seeing that her face was working with emotion.

"Yes," he went on, "Mary and Lizzie were much attached to each other, and Lizzie—that was Mrs. Percy—promised your mother, on her death-bed, that Stephen should be your husband, if you both grew up, while Mary seemed to be quite satisfied with the promise, for Stephen was a fine, sturdy boy, and a great favorite of your mother."

He paused again to look at her, and she was weeping quietly, so he said:

"That was one reason why I was always so anxious you should marry Stephen: but you don't seem to care much for the wishes of a dying mother."

She looked up at him gently.

"Do you think any one has a right to promise a girl against her will, even a mother?" she answered. "Are you sure my mother was quite sensible when she promised it? Did she promise it? You only said Mrs. Percy, you know."

He looked confused.

"Of course, of course, it was all understood; and your poor mother died happier for it. Mrs. Percy, poor woman, took cold at her funeral, and was buried three weeks after Mary, and that circumstance engraved it on all our memories."

"Were you rich then?" asked Edith.

"Yes, child, at least well off; and Percy and I saw that our fortunes would lie together. So we ratified the pledge mutually, and both swore to perform the agreement."

"Regardless of our wishes?"

"No, no, we agreed not to force you; but it was understood that we should use all legitimate means to persuade. Why, my dear, we even considered the possibility that one of us might meet with just such a misfortune as has overtaken me, and agreed that, in such a case, neither should falter from the bargain. Percy and I understood and trusted each other. We had worked at the same bench; been apprentices and journeymen together; and had stuck together in trouble, so that we were bound to do the same in prosperity. Why, did you know that there was a provision for the marriage in old Percy's will when he died, and that Stephen cannot go back on you, if you hold him to his promise?"

Edith colored deeply.

"Hold him to his promise! What! Do you think so meanly of your daughter, as to think she would hold a man if he wanted to get free of a promise?"

"But he does not, he does not. He is ready to kiss the very ground you walk on," the senator eagerly cried. "It's you who are the only obstinate person in the case."

"Of course. Because I dislike him. You know it. I should lead an unhappy life as his wife. He is jealous, tyrannical, and might be brutal."

"If he's jealous, that's a compliment to you. Tyrannical he is not—to you. He obeys your slightest wish. Brutal he could never be, for he adores you."

"Perhaps, because he cannot have me. It would be different after we were married."

The senator uttered a heavy sigh.

"Ah, well, we won't quarrel over it. If you won't, you won't. I have told you I am ruined. Let me add that I am sixty-seven, and that a man of sixty-seven cannot commence the world like one of twenty-seven."

There was a short silence, during which Edith seemed to be struggling with herself against something painful.

At last she said, in a low voice:

"Tell me, how would my—marrying Stephen—affect you? I want to be quite clear in my own mind what to do, father."

Overjoyed at her signs of yielding, he began eagerly to explain:

"I've been a fool, Edith, a great fool, but it was all for your sake, believe me. I'll tell you just how it came about. Two years ago that fellow, John Ray, was in our service, and our stock was at a hundred and fifty-seven. We were doing splendidly, and I was worth near a million of dollars outside of my stock. But old Percy was worth *ten* millions, and that nettled me every time I thought of it. I wanted my daughter to be any man's equal in fortune. I had the company in my own hands, but money did not come in to me as it did to Percy, and in an evil hour I began to gamble in stocks, under his advice. And I don't know how it is, friendship seems to be of no value among stock-gamblers. Percy and I had been like brothers; but I soon found that he was often on the opposite side of the market, and when he was, I was sure to lose. It was before I began these speculations that I invested half my savings for you in the hands of the trustees, and it was then that Percy and I executed our solemn written agreement as to your marriage with Stephen, the clauses of which are embodied in his will."

"And what were they?" asked Edith.

"That, on the day of your marriage, if any incumbrance rests on your property, it is to be removed before the ceremony, your husband's estate guaranteeing it, to the amount of one million dollars."

"Then," said Edith, in a low tone, "you were to sell me for money?"

"No, no," cried the senator, looking shocked; "you don't understand, child. Any incumbrance on *your* property, not mine, I said."

"Then how can my marriage help you in your debts?" she asked, raising her innocent brown eyes to his face.

The senator looked a little confused.

"Well, I'll tell you. I admit I have been foolish and imprudent; but I did it all for the best, Edith."

"And what did you do?" she asked. "I want to know everything, father. I will not say one word of reproach if you'll only tell me all. I've been kept in the dark so long, so long. Oh, if I had only known it all before!"

For the first time in their interview her voice had a sad, desolate ring, and the senator began to feel very uncomfortable.

"I'll tell you how it was, my dear," he went on; hurriedly; "I felt so sure of you marrying Stephen after our agreement that, I own, I was not careful enough. I did not heed my losses so much, because I knew that they were all made to old Fomp Percy. It seemed as if we held our money in common, and I didn't mind being in his debt. And Stephen was very much in love with you. I know that, as his wife, you would still be the richest woman in Chicago, and so I went on and put all I had and all you had into the house till it was gone, and then it was easy to get credit for the rest on the value of the property. But you must know that legally all these debts are mine, and that I am liable for them alone, as soon as it is discovered that I do not own the property."

"Then don't they know it?" she asked, in a tone of wonder and alarm.

The senator hung his head.

"They do not yet, and when they do, I am liable to arrest for obtaining goods on false pretenses. Now you know the worst. If you repudiate your word to marry Percy, you will still remain owner of the house, but I shall be compelled to fly to avoid arrest."

"And if I marry Stephen Percy?" she asked, gravely, "what then?"

"The liens will be paid off and I shall be free; besides—"

"Besides what?"

The old man colored deeply for the first time in the interview as he replied:

"Besides this I owe Stephen Percy fifty thousand dollars individually for my advanced age since I lost my fortune. He will not press me for it, and I shall be enabled to go on at my legitimate business and perhaps re-establish myself as I was once."

When the senator had finished there was a long silence.

Edith appeared to be thinking deeply, and her father did not dare interrupt her. At last she raised her head and looked at him inquiringly.

"How comes it that my trustees did not prevent this embarrassment?" she asked. "Who were they? I do not even know their names."

"One was Percy, the elder, the other was Seth Welby, our superintendent. Percy did not care, and Welby had no idea of the responsibility. He thought it was a mere honorary position."

"Then, really, they are liable to me as soon as I come of age?"

"Yes."

"And Mr. Welby has a family?"

"Yes, my dear. A large one."

"And if the matter is brought into court it will ruin him as well as you?"

"It will."

The senator grew more and more gloomy as these replies were forced out of him and Edith heaved a deep sigh.

"Then if I refuse to marry Stephen Percy," she said at last, "two families will be ruined, but I shall remain a rich girl!"

"Yes, my dear. You see, after all, I have saved *you* from harm."

Edith turned her head away.

"Yes," she said, reluctantly. "I believe you think so."

She paused a little while, and then went on in a hasty, unnatural way:

"I see you think so; but perhaps you don't see in what a position I should be. Could I remain happy when you were a fugitive from justice, with every one staring as I went by, to whisper: 'There's the heiress whose father cheated honest men, and ruined a life-long servant of the company that made his fortune? Could I rob little children to live in luxury myself? Could I ever marry an honest man? Could I even look one in the face? No, you have taken your measures well, father. I cannot help but yield. Some one has to suffer, and it is best that one should be myself. When do you want me to marry Stephen Percy?"

The senator fidgeted nervously.

"That is not for me to say, my dear, but if you wait till your majority, I fear there will be an exposure."

She rose up from her seat with a short, bitter laugh.

"I see. What is to be done must be done at once. I will marry him next week if you please. Write and tell him so."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"JIM-JAMS!"

MR. TIMOTHY FLYNN's select private boarding-house and restaurant was crowded with customers one evening, when a man muffled up in a long ulster with the collar turned up, came to the private entrance, and walked in, with his hat slouched over his eyes.

Tim, who was standing behind the bar, in such a position as to command the private entrance, immediately rapped on the panel for the useful Jessie to attend to business, while he went out to see the stranger, in whom he instantly knew his "queer customer," as he called him.

It was the person who had come in with the little man, now up-stairs in the private room.

The stranger nodded, and said in a low tone:

"Is he in?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tim, respectfully. "Do you want to see him?"

"Yes. No noise, you understand."

"All right, sir."

And the landlord took his queer customer up-stairs to the dark room, and rapped for admittance.

"Come in," said a hoarse voice, and as they opened the door, the queer customer said, in a disgusted way:

"Phol you need ventilation here."

This was a fact, for the dark room smelt undeniably bad of whisky, tobacco and numberless other odors equally agreeable.

The little man was snoring on the bed, and Red Mike had just waked up from a drunken slumber on the floor.

He sat up, frowzy and red-eyed, blinking at them in the dim light of a single gas-jet, and observed gruffly:

"Mornin', boss. What's up?"

The "queer customer" turned to Tim:

"We sha'n't want you, landlord. I've something to say to this man."

"All right, sir."

And Tim went away to the bar, where he at once took his station by the speaking-tube, to listen to what was going on in the dark room, as well as he could do it, amid the noise below.

Meantime the queer customer put up his hat, threw down his collar, and revealed the features of Stephen Percy, who said to Mike:

"Well, you appear to have been enjoying yourself, my friend."

"Yes, boss. Short life and a merry one," answered Mike, with a hiccup.

"Why haven't you reported to me?"

"Cause, I'd nothen to tell yer."

"Has John Ray entered the city?"

"No, boss. Leastwise not as I knows on."

"Did you go to the train as I told you?"

"Yes, boss; but he wasn't thar."

"How do you know?"

"Cause I know him well enough. I've been to every train since, and he ain't come yet."

Percy looked at him doubtfully.

"Aro you sur he's not slipped you?"

"Guess not, boss."

"Well, he has."

Mike looked sullenly at the wall. He knew that his cue was silence till he found out just how much the young man knew.

"Yes; he's here," pursued Percy, "in the city somewhere, and I want to find him and drive him out. I'll pay what you like for the job; but it must be done, and I must be certain it is done."

Mike scratched his head.

"How'm I to find him, boss?"

"He will come to my office at ten to-morrow, on business. You must follow him and find

where he lives. After that, don't let him escape you."

"All right, boss. Anything else?"

"No; that's all. What's the matter with that man on the bed?"

"Tight," was the laconic response.

Percy looked at the sleeper, who was deeply flushed and breathing heavily, and remarked, dryly:

"It wouldn't be much loss to any one if he was never seen again."

Mike's eyes glittered.

"He needn't be, if *you* say so, boss," he observed, slyly. "Easy enough fur him to roll over and git smothered."

Percy started, and shuddered slightly.

"No, no, I don't mean that. I didn't say anything of the sort. But if—if he did drink himself to death, no one would lose by it. He's a fool. He's been found out."

Then he looked at the sleeper more closely, and added, in a tone of disgust:

"Bahl! what a fellow to be tied to! I wish I'd never seen him."

Mike noted every movement and look, and thought to himself:

"He wants him dead, and daren't say it. Reckon he's afraid of him alive."

Percy did not stay long in the room, but departed, after enjoining Mike not to fail him on the following day.

Then, as the young man's footsteps died away in the hall, the tramp went to his companion and shook him awake.

Stover—for the little man was that unfortunate scamp—woke up and asked what was the matter.

"Matter?" echoed Mike. "Matter enough. Do you want to get the jim-jams?"

Stover stared round him helplessly.

"Tho' jim-jams? What's that? Oh, yes, I know. No, I'm all right. Look here, where's the bottle?"

"Bottle's empty," replied Mike, sulkily.

"Go and get another, then. Curse you, I won't stay in this dark hole without something to put me to sleep without dreaming. I can't sleep without it. I see all sorts of things round me—"

"There, by gum, you've got 'em," cried Mike triumphantly. "That's jest what they is, young fell'r."

Stover looked at him stupidly.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "There's nothing the matter with me. I mean I think of all sorts of things, and the whisky makes me forget them. Has Percy been here?"

"No," answered Mike, unblushingly. "He don't want to know us. He's given you up, I reckon."

"He'd better not," said Stover, angrily. "I can prove things against him—Here. Go down and get another bottle—"

Then he began to feel in his pockets and to look disturbed, and presently said, with a white, scared face:

"My God! where's my money?"

"Money?" echoed Mike, alarmed in his turn. "Why? what's come of it?"

"I don't know," was the helpless reply. "I had it, and it's gone. I've been robbed."

Mike started and scowled at him.

"Gawl darn your skin. D'yer mean to say I robbed yer?"

"No, no," was the timorous reply. "I don't say anything; but I had it, and it's gone."

"Let's call Tim," suggested Mike. "Mebbe he's took it fur safe-keeping."

Stover tottered unsteadily to the pipe, and whispered down it:

"Hallo—I say."

"Well?" growled back Tim's voice.

"Landlord," whispered Stover. "I've been robbed. My money—do you know anything of it?"

"Yes," growled back Tim, "you shut up yer head. There's a cop in the bar-room, and if you make so much noise they'll pull the house. I've got your money all safe; what's left of it."

Then Stover came away from the pipe thoroughly scared.

"Ho says there's a policeman in the bar-room," he observed to Mike. "Do you—do you think they're—after—me?"

His voice sunk to a whisper in his fright, and Mike answered scornfully.

"Like enough. What of it? No cop can't find you here. You jest keep still an' I'll go down and find out."

"Oh, thank you," replied Stover, gratefully. "Come back quick, and bring the whisky, for God's sake. My nerves are all in a tremble."

Mike went to the bar and asked for a bottle of whisky, when Tim said sullenly:

"Can't you keep that galoot still? He was howling down the pipe, so I had to shut it up, or he'd have skeered the boys. Has he got 'em?"

"'Feard he has," said Mike, gravely. "I want the whisky to quiet him."

"Take it along—and—look-a-here—Mike."

Tim leaned over the bar to whisper:

"Keen him so. There's money in it."

Mike exchanged a knowing glance.

"How much?"

"Half the swag. I've got it."

"How much is there?"

"A thousand I reckon. I hain't counted."

"Gimme five hundred, and I'm fly," was the prompt retort.

Tim nodded.

"Git him quiet, and you shall have it."

Mike took the bottle under his arm and went up-stairs to the dark room, where he found Stover crouching on the floor, his eyes fixed on the wall, groaning and shaking like a leaf.

Mike spoke to him, and the poor wretch uttered a yell and ran to a corner of the room, moaning:

"Leave me alone. I won't tell, I won't, I swear. I didn't say Percy, it was Ray I said. I didn't steal it."

"Oh, give us a rest," growled Mike, in a contemptuous way. "Here, take a drink and shut up."

The scent of the liquor calmed Stover instantly, and he seized the bottle eagerly and drank a deep draught, which acted like magic, for he spoke in a more rational way, as if just waked up:

"Is that you, Mike? Oh, for God's sake get me out of here. I've had such horrid dreams. I can't stay here any longer. It's like hell itself. Take me out. I've not felt the air for a week."

Mike shook his head, saying:

"'Twouldn't do, Johnny. 'Twouldn't be safe. You've b'en doing something, ain't ye?"

"Never mind what. My God, man, all the jails in the world are nothing to this place. It's full of devils. I see them all the time when I'm alone; but they go away when any one comes. Take me out, Mike; for God's sake take me out."

Mike hesitated.

"You're sure you'll be quiet if I do? You won't go to howlin' in the street and raisin' Cain, will yer?"

"No, I swear I won't," pleaded Stover, so earnestly that Mike yielded, and the pair stole softly down-stairs to the private entrance.

No sooner was the door opened, however, than Stover uttered a wild yell, darted out into the frosty night, and ran off like a deer, shrieking all the way, with Mike after him, trying to catch up in vain, for the tramp was fat and out of condition, while the little man, naturally lithe and supple, was endowed with all the strength of lunacy.

Half an hour later the tramp came back, pale as a ghost, saying:

"He's gone, Tim. They've got him."

"Who's got him?"

"The cops, and he's going to squeal. He's ravin' 'bout his money now."

CHAPTER XXVII.

SETTLING UP BUSINESS.

MR. O'ROURKE was buried in the arms of slumber when he was awakened by the violent ringing of his door-bell, and Mrs. O'Rourke informed him that she was sure it must be burglars, and that he mustn't think of going down without taking his revolver.

"Burglars don't ring bells, Mrs. O'Rourke," placidly responded her husband. "It's a client—bad luck to him—and I've been expecting him for days."

Here the bell rung again.

"Ah, ring away! Can't ye give a man time to cover himself decently?" cried O'Rourke, as he struggled into his trowsers.

"There, then, bad luck to ye! Where's me slippers, Kate?"

"Under the foot of the bed, where they ought to be. Now, Phelim, if you get murdered on your own doorstep, don't say I didn't warn you to take your pistol."

"And why?"

"Ring! Ring! Ring!"

"Why would I be takin' a pistol to a client?" pursued O'Rourke, as he went down-stairs. Then, raising his voice, roared: "Stop that ringing, ye omadhau! Don't ye suppose I've got ears?"

"Quick! quick!" came in muffled tones through the panels. "You're wanted."

He recognized in the voice the tones of Red Mike, and quietly went into the parlor, turned on and lighted the gas, and took a pistol out of a desk before he opened the street door, muttering:

"Kate wasn't so wrong after all."

stole afore we tech'd it. I'll make a clean breast of it, sir."

"You'd better, if ye want help."

"I will, boss. Yer see, Tim's had a boarder called Stover—"

"I know it," interrupted O'Rourke. "I've been expecting to see him. What's been the matter with him?"

"He's been drunk all the time, hid away, and Tim went through his clothes only yesterday, for fear he might lose his cash."

"Very kind of Tim. Go on."

"And to-night the galoot found out his money was gone, and it set him in the jim-jams, and he got out into the street a-yellin' like fifty Injuns, and the cops clubbed him and run him in."

"Is that all?"

"No, sir. He's been a-ravin' in the cell, and the cops have been a-listenin' and they've found out his name, fur he told 'em."

"And what then?"

"Why, they all dropped on him, and they're arter the money. It was all in the papers 'bout him, they tells me. Mebbe you seen it."

O'Rourke scratched his nose thoughtfully, remarking to himself, audibly:

"There's a wonderful power in human nature, after all. It puts the best laid plans to ruin. Well, what do you want me to do for ye?"

"To tell us what to do and how to hold on to the money," whispered Mike. "There's nine thousand and more dollars, Tim tells me, in them yaller bills. Fu'st he lied to me, but when he found I were goin' to peach, he promised me half, to get hunk with me."

"And ye want me to advise ye?"

"Sart'in, counselor."

"Then I'll tell ye. Pay the money into coort, and keep safe, or ye'll all be in jail to-morrow."

Mike stared, and his jaw dropped.

"In jail?"

"In jail. I've known where that man was, and what he'd got, for a week. You tell Tim I've been engaged by the other side, and that he'd better have the full ten thousand dollars ready to pay over to-morrow morning. He's got it all, the thief of the world. As for this bill ye gave me, I'll turn it over meself as evidence if ye don't come here in the morning with Tim, as I said, and pay the money. It was stolen from me friend, Mr. Ray. D'ye mind that?"

Then he rose up, showing his cocked pistol, and led Mike to the door, where he dismissed him with the warning:

"Do as I tell you, or look out!"

Then he locked the door and went back to the parlor, in the corner of which was a telephone communicating with the Police Headquarters.

The lawyer rung a bell, and presently a faint, muffled voice asked:

"Well, what is it? Who's there?"

"O'Rourke. Have ye a prisoner brought in, drunk and disorderly, with delirium tremens, at any station? He ran out of Tim Flynn's, and they took him in."

"I'll see," said the voice.

There was a long silence, and at last, as O'Rourke was getting impatient, the following colloquy ensued:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that you, inspector?"

"Yes. That you, counselor?"

"Ay, ay; have ye found him?"

"Yes. He's at the eighteenth. Do you want him for anything?"

"D'ye know who he is?"

"No; do you?"

"It's Stover, the Emerald man, that we've been watching. Hold on to him, but don't let his name out. There's a big fish in the net if we can haul it in. I'll see you in the morning."

"All right, counselor."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

Then the lawyer went up-stairs, and parried all his wife's inquiries with the formula he had used so often:

"Business, me darling—business. Go to sleep, and so'll I, if I can."

And in ten minutes he was off, sound as a church, for the incident was a common one in his exciting life.

The next morning, bright and early, he was at the Appomattox House, and went up-stairs to room 88, from which he returned in half an hour with John Ray, no longer in the disguise of Richards, and the two took their way to a certain police court, where they waited till the un-washed prisoners of the previous night were brought up, and the haggard face and shivering figure of Stover, just as he had run out of Tim Flynn's, in his shirt and trowsers, bare-headed, and in his stockings, was hauled up to the bench.

Then O'Rourke stepped forward and said to the judge:

"I'm this gentleman's counsel. We waive examination, and give bail to appear."

The magistrate nodded.

"All right. Name your bondsmen."

"I'm one, meself, if your Honor will take me. I can justify in twice the amount."

"All right. Clerk, draw the papers. Will you take care of him?"

"Certainly—your Honor."

And poor little Stover, looking more like a corpse than a man, collapsed from his excitement, sensible, and trembling with craven fear as he recognized John, was marched off to a carriage and taken to the house of a famous doctor of O'Rourke's acquaintance, who kept an establishment for just such cases.

Into his hands Stover was consigned by O'Rourke, after a long, secret consultation with the doctor, and then, as the two drove off, the lawyer remarked:

"So far so good. You've got the thief. Now for the money."

"We'll not see it," returned John, with a wise shake of the head.

"I will see it. You don't study human nature as I do, my boy. Red Mike's a slave to a stronger will, and bedad he struck a rock when he struck me. He'll be waitin' for us."

And when they arrived at O'Rourke's house, sure enough, there was Red Mike, furtive in aspect and pale of face, with Tim Flynn beside him, looking humble, both in the parlor, where they had been waiting for half an hour, and the lawyer asked Tim in his sharpest tones:

"Well, have ye brought the bills?"

"Yes, counselor," returned Tim in his most oily manner. "Here they are, sir."

O'Rourke counted them over, and observed:

"There's only ninety-five here. Where's the other five? Hand them over, ye blackguard."

"But, counselor," whined Tim, "I had to board that galoot fur ever so long—"

"Hand them over, or ye'll have trouble. Look out of the window."

Tim went to the window, and saw two policemen watching the house, at which he shivered and came back, hauling out three more bills, which he gave to O'Rourke.

"I sent yer two of 'em by Mike for a retainer, boss," he explained.

"Ye did? I only got one. Here it is. Now, Mike, me dear friend, hand over the other."

Which Mike proceeded unwillingly to do, and O'Rourke laid the whole package before John, with the remark:

"There's your money. Ye can do as ye like about paying a reward; but my advice is, don't ye give Red Mike a cent till he's done his work for us. Tim's different."

John handed Tim Flynn one of the bills.

"That ought to pay all your expenses in this matter," he said.

Tim took the bill gratefully; for he knew that O'Rourke would not have done as well by him, and answered:

"You're a gentleman, sir. Ef I kin do anything for ye, I will."

"Ye can," observed O'Rourke, meaningly. "I'd not be letting ye have that, if we didn't want ye. I'll tell ye what it is this evening. Come here at eight."

"Very good, counselor."

And Tim faded away, along with Red Mike, who looked very hungry and disappointed, while the lawyer consulted his watch.

"It's nearly ten o'clock. Let's go to see the elegant Mr. Paircy. Now comes the hard part of our job. Ye've got the money back, but this Paircy's a millionaire and hard to beat, and we've got to get him on his knees, if ye hope to marry Edith Wallis."

They drove off, in a hack, to the offices of the great railroad company, of which Percy was now president, and found the young man in an inner office, seated at a table which was covered with books and papers.

He nodded distantly as they came in.

"You are—"

"The stockholders of the Diamond Car Company, with the certificates of all the stock," said the lawyer, quietly. "We have resolved to have a new deal, and demand of ye the books and papers of the concern, in which ye have no longer any stock."

"I am aware of that, and am ready to give them up," returned Percy, with a slight sneer.

O'Rourke sat down, and looked carefully over all the books and papers, John with him.

When they had finished their inspection of the books, O'Rourke took up the papers.

Percy yawned and looked at his watch, with the remark:

"The papers are ready, and I will sign them at once, as I am rather in a hurry to-day. The fact is, I am going to be married, and the hour is set for twelve."

O'Rourke was poring over a paper as he spoke, and the lawyer trod on John's foot under the table just in time to stop the young man from starting, though he could not help turning his face on Percy with a half-menacing stare.

There was a dead silence in the office for nearly a minute, and then O'Rourke said, quietly:

"I'd be sorry to keep ye on yer wedding-day, Mr. Paircy, but there's something in this paper that wants alteration."

"And what's that?" asked Percy, tipping back his chair and putting his hands in his pockets, while his face took the hard look of a man trying to get the best of a bargain.

"I obsairve that the Diamond Car Company has a ten-years' contract with your roads to run sleepers and hotel-cars, at a rate that's men-

tioned elsewhere. There's no provision in this agreement for any continuance of that contract."

"Because I don't care to continue it, and it lapses," retorted Percy.

"I beg your pardon. The original calls for ten years, and there are four yet to run. We are entitled to them, and intend to have them."

"Indeed? and how are you going to work to get them? I'm president of the road, now, and I don't intend to renew the contract."

"But you can't run the road without the sleepers, Mr. Paircy."

"That's my business; I may have cars of my own. The fact is, you sleeping-car fellows have been making too much off us railroad men—"

"Stop," interrupted O'Rourke, sharply. "I came here to talk business; nothing else. I don't want your reasons. Do ye refuse to sign the contract?"

"I do, distinctly."

"Very well, then. We'll have to make ye."

"Perhaps so. I'd like to know how. In the mean time, I can't waste any more of my leisure talking to you. There's my resignation. There are the books and papers. You can take possession as soon as you like; but you can't run a car on any of my roads, and I've bought up all the claims on the plant, and have sheriff's officers now in charge. So you see, Mr. John Ray," he continued, turning round on the young man with open and undisguised triumph, "I've beaten you in your little game, after all. You thought to swallow the company into the Emeread; and you've nothing but your papers to show for your money. Now get out of my office, both of you. Bundle up your papers and clear out, or I'll call the men to put you out."

He swaggered to the door, and they could see a number of porters lounging about outside, as if waiting for orders, while Stephen was evidently anxious to provoke a fight.

John turned pale with anger, and was almost bursting out, when O'Rourke said, warningly:

"Don't play into his hands. Let him assault us if he dares. Pack up the books into the bags, and I'll talk to him."

They had brought two large bags to hold papers, and into these John began to bundle them, when O'Rourke, in his most insinuating way, observed:

"Now, me dear Mr. Paircy, ye should talk rason. I've a little word to say to ye."

"And I won't listen to it," retorted Percy. "I tell you I'm going to my wedding, you cursed fool. Here, boys, come in and put these men out, if they don't go."

He opened the door as he spoke, and the railroad men began to come up, looking glum and determined, when O'Rourke raised his stentorian voice, shouting:

"Don't ye lay a finger on us, or I'll have ye all in jail for resisting the officers of the coort. Look here."

"As he spoke, he pulled out a paper, and flourished it before Percy.

"D'ye see that, Mr. Paircy? A mandamus, Mr. Paircy—commanding ye to carry out that contract or show cause why ye don't do it. Ye'll obey that, or by the piper that played before Moses, I'll have ye arrested at the altar. I've the officers all waiting. Now, ye blackguards, lay a finger on us, if ye dare. Mr. Ray, we don't want to stay here. Mr. Paircy has already committed contempt of court, and we can't do better than to get out, as he politely puts it to us."

John had the bags full by this time, catching the lawyer's cue; and the railroad men, who were staggered by the name of the law, and the sight of the paper gave way, and allowed them to pass, while Stephen Percy seemed to be hesitating, and at last cried out:

"Here, come back, come back. I've got an idea. I'll sign the contract."

"I thought ye would," said O'Rourke, so placidly that it was evident all his loud talking had been put on for effect.

He came back; laid the contract he had himself prepared on the table, and Percy signed it; when O'Rourke put it in his breast pocket with the remark:

"That closes the business. Now, Mr. Paircy, ye can go and get married, and much good luck go with ye."

Percy nodded and smiled, affably.

"Thank you sir. I hope your good wishes may be fulfilled."

Then he turned on John, with the same triumphant smile he had shown at the young man's first entrance, saying:

"And you, Mr. Ray? You don't wish me joy, though I've just come to your terms. That's hardly handsome, for I'm going to marry a lady you know very well."

John was livid, but he tried to smile as he answered:

"I've no right to presume so far, sir, our acquaintance being limited to business."

"Oh, no," replied Percy, in the same way, "you can't get out of it in that way. I feel quite kindly toward you now, though you did try to undermine me once. I'm going to take my wedding trip east, in one of your cars; and I hope you'll treat me and my wife well. Good-

by now. I'm going to the church. Hope to see you there. By the by, I suppose you know who the bride is to be?"

John ground his teeth.

"No, sir, and I don't want to know."

"Ah, well, it's Miss Edith Wallis, my esteemed friend. In half an hour she will be Mrs. Percy. Ta, ta!" And he waved his hand desirously as he left the office.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUST IN TIME.

JOHN RAY was as pale as a ghost as he looked at O'Rourke, when Percy went out of the office, and the lawyer only shrugged his shoulders, and observed:

"He's stolen a march on ye. He's not such a fool after all. Come along."

They went out of the office, entered the hack in which they had come, and were driven round to O'Rourke's house, the lawyer preserving a deep silence all the way, and John completely broken down.

At last the young man broke into a curse of despair, ejaculating:

"Why did I ever come here?"

"To catch a thief, ye told me," said O'Rourke, dryly. "and to see Miss Wallis. Ye've done the first, and carried your point; but it seems ye've not done the last."

"How could I? I didn't dare to go to the house till I'd something to say. And now, when fortune is in my grasp, to lose her for whom I've struggled all these years—it's—it's—I won't endure it. He shall not marry her."

"And how are you going to help it?" asked the lawyer, who, like most married men, had little sympathy for despairing lovers. "Can you stop the wedding?"

John started, and slapped O'Rourke on the shoulder, with an air of suddenly-formed resolution.

"Thank you for the word. I'll do it."

"Ye'll not be making an ass of yourself, John Ray," returned O'Rourke, sharply. "The gentleman's got a right to marry the lady if she chooses to have him, and it's too late to stop it."

"It's not too late," cried John. "It's never too late to act like a man. Here, good-by. I'm going to get out."

And he flung open the carriage-door, and would have leaped out, had not the big, burly lawyer grappled him with all his strength, crying:

"Hold on, hold on. Where are ye going? By the piper that played before Moses, ye don't go without me."

"Will you really go with me?" asked the young man, relaxing his efforts.

"If ye must go, yes. Ye need a cooler head to keep ye out of trouble. Here we are at the house. Take in the papers. We don't want to have them stolen. They've given us too much bother."

They carried the papers into the house of the lawyer, came out again, and John said to the coachman:

"To Senator Wallis's house, quick!"

Away they rattled through the streets, and soon passed by a magnificent marble palace, standing in the midst of grounds that had been laid out in the most sumptuous fashion imaginable.

O'Rourke nodded toward it.

"D'y know that place?"

"No."

John spoke indifferently. He was too anxious to notice anything.

"That's 'Wallis's Folly,' they call it—the house that's made all the trouble. I hear it's not quite finished inside; but the happy couple can manage to struggle along in it till the garnets are furnished, as they ought to be."

John ground his teeth, but made no reply.

In a short time they drew up before the porch of the Wallis mansion, where a number of carriages were waiting.

John and the lawyer jumped out; and then, for the first time, the young man's heart began to fail him as he thought of what he had to do.

The respectable servant opened the door, stared in surprise at the two men "who had not on the wedding garments," and stood across the doorway, saying:

"What is it, gentlemen? Cards, please."

John mechanically pulled out his card, but the waiter waved it away.

"Don't mean that, sah. Mean de weddin'-cards. Only de invited guests in to-day, sah."

"We don't want to see the wedding, me friend," interposed O'Rourke, adroitly. "We want that card taken to Miss Wallis. D'yemind that, now?"

And, as he spoke, he shoved a ten-dollar bill into the black palm, at which the waiter weakened perceptibly, glanced over his shoulder, and said, in a low voice:

"Git into de libr'y, den. No one dar. I'll give it to Miss Edy."

And so smuggled them into an empty hall, while the sound of voices up-stairs showed that the guests were in the drawing-room.

He opened the library door, and John Ray found himself, for the first time in two years, in that room where he had first seen Edith Wal-

lis alone; where he had told her he loved her, and promised to come back when his fortune was equal to hers.

They waited for a long time, and no one came; till John began to mutter to himself in a fierce manner, and O'Rourke said warningly to him:

"Be careful. You're in another man's house, without invitation."

"I cannot be careful. Oh, if she would only come! If I could see her once!"

And at that very moment, glancing out of the window, he saw another carriage drive up, from which descended Stephen Percy with another gentleman, equally rich in his attire.

John uttered a curse under his breath, and was actually rushing to the door when O'Rourke threw his arms around him and held him firmly, saying:

"Ye can't [I] go, tell ye. I'll not have it. Do ye want to get into the papers like a fool, and have all the world laughing at ye?"

"I don't care," muttered John, his face white as a sheet, his eyes glaring. "I'll kill him. He sha'n't have her, by—"

The young man was beside himself with jealous fury, and but for the great strength of the burly O'Rourke, would undoubtedly have run out and committed some rash act; but just as he was breaking loose, he turned his face back to the wall and ceased to struggle, transfixed with amazement.

There stood Edith Wallis, pale as the bridal dress in which she was arrayed, by the side door of the library, to which she had stolen away from the guests above, when her quadroon maid, Rose, slipped the card into her hand.

O'Rourke saw her, too, and let John go, when the young man, no longer able to control himself, rushed forward, fell on his knees at the lady's feet, and covered her hand with kisses, sobbing out:

"Oh, Edith; my love, my love, I have come back as I said. Is it too late? For God's sake don't say no! I've loved you so long, waited so patiently, slaved so hard. I am your equal in fortune now. They cannot call me a fortune-hunter. I know you hate that wretch; I know they are forcing you to marry him. For God's sake tell me you don't love him!"

She seemed to be growing paler and paler as she looked at him, and kept her hand pressed to her side as if in pain, as she faltered out:

"Oh, why did you come? Did you not know what had happened?"

"Happened? No. What has happened?"

"My father is ruined. I can save him by marrying. Percy has him in his power. It is too late. Oh, why did you come to tear my heart in two?"

She made no pretense of coyness to him. The situation to her was too real and full of intense pain to permit her to hide that she loved the handsome young man at her feet, and dreaded the approach of Percy; but she could only say:

"Why did you come to tear my heart in two? Why did you come?"

John rose up beside her, and put his arm round her.

"Because I love you; because I know you love me; because I would save you from eternal wretchedness; because, if you marry Percy, you are false to yourself—you will swear to a lie. Edith, it cannot be done. You must not do this thing."

"But I have promised," she said faintly.

"I have promised, too," he answered. "I told you I would make my fortune equal to yours, and I have done it. I told you I would come back, and I am here. I command you not to marry that man. It would be a sin and a sacrilege to do so. I will not suffer it. You love me, and you must marry me."

O'Rourke, who was watching them closely, thought to himself:

"There's human nature for ye."

Edith Wallis actually seemed afraid of the young man, did not offer to resist him as he put his arm around her, but only said in a pleading way:

"But my father, John? What will become of him?"

"I will take care of him. He shall not want. Nay, we have no time to lose. There is only one way now. O'Rourke—"

"What is it?" asked the lawyer promptly, for he saw an expression on the young man's face that he had never seen there before. "What is it?"

"Go out and get a cloak for this lady—quick."

O'Rourke was a lawyer, but he was also an Irishman born, and his quick wit jumped to the truth immediately. With a grin of comprehension he darted out into the hall, seized James, the colored waiter, by the arm, and whispered:

"Quick, ye're a jewel. Get me a big cloak and hat for the lady at once. Tell her maid to come. Ye devil, it's Lord Plantagenet is inside, and she'll be a rale lady an you butler in a palace if ye help us now. Here's ten dollars more."

James was an old servitor of the house, but there were peculiarities in his case. James had not received any wages for six months, and had often heard the subject of his master's coming "smash-up" discussed by the servants.

He knew that "Miss Edith" had been to Europe, and had heard all sorts of rumors about some duke being in love with her.

James jumped to the conclusion that the duke had come, and at once answered:

"All right, sah, I understand."

Then he walked off, and in less than five minutes returned with a costly furred cloak and hood, with which O'Rourke hurried back into the library, to find Edith in tears, and John comforting her as he held her in his arms.

Without asking questions or making any comments, the lawyer went up to them and threw the cloak over the lady's white shoulders, saying in a low tone:

"Hurry up, me boy, or they'll be looking for her. Oh, this b'ates cock-fighting."

And James had the cloak fastened and the furred hood over Edith's bright braids in a moment; then, half leading, half carrying her, hurried her to the door, which was opened by James with a wink, when they went up to the first carriage near, stepped in, and O'Rourke got up on the box with the driver, saying as he shoved a ten-dollar bill into his pocket:

"Drive like the devil was after ye. It's the Duke of Westminster Abbey's inside, with a lady fri'nd. Drive to Maberly street, to the house of Doctor Scudder."

The driver stared, gathered up his reins and drove off at a rattling pace, down the street, while quiet reigned over the Wallis mansion for a good ten minutes more.

Then James, on his post at the door, heard Mrs. Van Cott rustling down the steps, and speaking as she came:

"James! James!"

"Yes, marm."

"Have you seen Miss Edith? Is she in the library?"

"She was in there, marm, a minute ago."

Mrs. Van Cott went to the door, knocked twice, and finally went in; but came back in a moment, saying:

"She's not there. You must be mistaken. Are you sure she was in there?"

"Yes, marm, for certain. Reckon she's gone out the other door. Been to her room, marm?"

"Yes. I can't imagine—"

Mrs. Van Cott began to look scared as she went back; for the senator had sent her to find his daughter, and tell her that Mr. Percy had come, and that it was time to go to church.

When she got to the door of the grand drawing-room, which was full of guests, the senator came out, looking cross.

"Well, what's the matter? Is she coming?"

"I don't know, sir."

Mrs. Van Cott trembled at the savage frown on the old man's face, as he growled:

"What d'ye mean? Confound it, is she or isn't she? Did you see her?"

"No, sir."

"Is her door locked, then?"

"No, sir. She's not in her room."

"Not in her room!"

The senator rushed up-stairs, and met, on the landing, the quadroon maid, who was crying.

"What's the matter? Where's your mistress?" he asked, turning pale, as he began to see something was wrong.

Rose began to wring her hands.

"Deed, sah, 'twarn't my fault, sah, but James he said as how 'twere the duke as wanted 'em fo' Miss Edy, sah."

"Wanted what?"

"Miss Edy's sleighing cloak and hood, sah. I see 'em drive off, sah. I t'ink she run away, sah."

The senator uttered a furious blasphemy, as all the habits of his late years vanished in his excitement, and he swore like a good, old-fashioned journeyman carpenter.

"Run away!" he hissed, shaking poor Rosy violently. "Why the devil didn't you stop her, confound you? What made you— Bah!"

He threw the girl off, rushed down-stairs, and up to Stephen Percy, who saw in a moment that something was wrong.

"She's gone," he whispered; "gone! Run away! I don't understand it."

"Gone!" echoed Percy, and for a moment he seemed to be struck helpless.

The next moment he began to curse and swear at John Ray.

"It's that carpenter fellow, that Ray, I'll bet a thousand to one. The fortune-hunting thief! Let's catch him! They can't have gone far!"

They ran down-stairs, hatless as they were, and called up a carriage, and told the driver to follow the coach that had driven away.

Now, of course, all the drivers had been discussing the incident to enliven their wait outside, and it so happened that one of them had heard the words, "Dr. Scudder"—the name of a prominent Methodist minister in the city.

So he called out:

"They've gone to old Scudder's to git spliced. Hurry up and you'll ketch 'em in time."

Then away rattled the carriage at full speed, and in ten minutes more reached the door of the minister, when both men jumped out and ran up the steps, ringing furiously at the bell.

As soon as they were admitted, Percy called out:

"Where's Doctor Scudder? There's a villain run off with my wife, and they're in here, I know. Where are they?"

And so bolted past the servant into the parlor, to be confronted by the stalwart form of O'Rourke, while John Ray and Edith, the lady trembling and clinging to the young man's arm, stood before the minister, who was just withdrawing his hand from the attitude of blessing, as he said:

"Amen!"

"Stop the ceremony! I'll have you all arrested," screamed Percy, shaking his fist at the minister. "That girl—"

In a moment John Ray wheeled round and rushed for him, looking so dangerous that Percy would have suffered badly, had not O'Rourke got in the way, setting his broad back in front of John, and shoving him back by main force, ejaculating:

"Keep still now, keep still, I tell ye."

And the old minister held up his hands ejaculating:

"What's the meaning of this? Who are these persons?"

"Persons!" screamed Percy, beside himself with fury. "I'm Stephen Percy, and that's my wife."

"Your wife!"

The minister seemed to be too utterly astounded to say any more, but O'Rourke, who had succeeded in quieting John, came up to the young millionaire, his burly figure looking larger than ever, as he said in his sweetest tones:

"Ye've made a little mistake, me fri'nd."

"I've made no mistake!" screamed Percy. "I tell you that's my wife. She's a minor, and here's her father. Ask him."

The minister caught the words and hurried up, excitedly asking:

"Is the lady a minor? Are you her father?"

"Yes," said the old senator, unsteadily. He was very pale and trembling, as he looked round him, from the moment he had set eyes on his daughter.

All his passion seemed to have gone out of him, in strong contrast to that of Percy, who seemed to be so frantic that he had lost all his natural fear of physical violence.

"Then why don't you take her and bring her back to the house?" shrieked Percy, dancing about in his fury. "She said she'd marry me, and she's got to do it. There she is, senator. Why don't you take her?"

The old man slowly advanced, when John Ray left O'Rourke, walked quickly over to Edith, who stood like one in a trance all this while, and drew her arm through his own, saying:

"Senator, your rights have ended. This lady is my wife."

The senator turned to Dr. Scudder.

"Is that true?" he asked, in a low voice.

The minister, who was quivering with nervous excitement at the scene which had been precipitated upon him, could only falter:

"My dear sir, I didn't—I couldn't—know she was a minor—it's—it's too—too late to be undone. They are married, now. I hope—it's all for the best, my dear sir. Young folks will be young folks—Yes—yes; they're married."

And he drew a long breath, peering anxiously into the senator's face, for he knew that he had incurred a legal penalty for marrying a minor.

But the old man, now that all was quiet round him, seemed to strangely calm at last.

"Are you married?" he asked Edith.

"Yes, sir," she answered, almost inaudibly.

"Did you tell the clergyman you were of age?"

"No, no—" interrupted the minister, nervously; "let me explain. It's all my fault. I didn't ask. The lady looks so mature I presumed it was all right, and—"

"Then they are fast married?" the old man interrupted.

"Yes, sir. Fast married."

The senator looked at the pair, so young and handsome, as they stood before him, arm in arm, and a look came into his eyes that caused Edith to leave her husband and spring to her father's neck, sobbing and crying to him to "forgive her, she couldn't help it," and so forth, in whispers, while he said nothing, but patted her head softly, and looked at John.

As for Percy, O'Rourke had backed him into a corner of the room, and was saying to him:

"Now, me dear sir, me dear Paircy, all's fair in love and war, ye know. Ye'll not be making a show of yourself in the papers. No, ye can't go there. Ye can bring a suit for damages, ye know. Ye've been shamefully treated, shamefully. It's an outrage on ye, but there's no help for it. They're fast married."

"I'll have my revenge," cried Percy, with a wrench, tearing himself away from O'Rourke's grasp, and rushing to the door.

"You, Wallis, look out for yourself. I'll sell you out to-morrow."

The old senator turned his head as he stood there, with his daughter in his arms, saying quietly:

"The sooner the better. I couldn't help it, but I'm glad it ended thus. I'm weary of you and your insolence, you cowardly, underbred

snob. Go. I give my consent to the marriage. Now do your worst."

"You'll see if I won't," snarled Percy, as he rushed out.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

AND he did his worst, which was bad enough; for a rich man has a great deal of power in any civilized country, and Percy was still a rich man, with plenty of friends.

The very next day came a number of attachments on the old senator's property, and the wedding guests, who had scattered all over the city after the sudden breaking up of the fashionable ceremony they had expected to attend, spread everywhere the news that the proud senator, who had so long been counted a millionaire, was nothing but a pauper, after all, and had not a penny to call his own after he had paid his debts.

But then came another surprise for Percy, on which he had not quite calculated.

The senator's debt to him, of fifty thousand dollars, was paid on the very day the attachments were put on the house, and the next day the new palace, on which so much money had been lavished, was put into the papers, advertised for sale, and finally bought by a great Colorado cattle king, who paid cash for it, so that all the senator's debts were discharged, and a handsome surplus left to live on.

To be sure this last piece of business took a little time, for the house belonged to the daughter, not the father, on the records, and the cattle monarch refused to complete his bargain till the lady came of age, a month later.

But finally all was accomplished, and the very next day appeared in the Chicago *Times* the following notice:

"A meeting of the stockholders of the Diamond Car Company was held yesterday at the house of ex-Senator Wallis, when that gentleman was unanimously elected president, his son-in-law, Mr. John Ray, vice-president and secretary in one; Mr. Phelim O'Rourke, treasurer. These three gentlemen, in fact, comprise all the stockholders, and, under their energetic management, the stock has already risen to sixty-three. It is rumored that there will shortly be effected a consolidation of the Diamond and Emerald Car Companies, in which case the future of the reorganized company may be considered as assured. The new managers have already sold off a great many of the expensive and unprofitable cars introduced during the disastrous Percy *regime*, and are curtailing expenses and increasing profits daily. Judge Boomholder yesterday renewed the peremptory mandamus to compel the Great Occidental Road to perform their contract with the Diamond Company, and sleepers will be run as usual on all night trains. The rights of the traveling public have thus been triumphantly vindicated, against the whims of a tyrannical corporation."

On the same day that this notice appeared, Mr. Phelim O'Rourke, in the new offices of the Diamond Car Company, much simpler than the old rooms, said to the vice-president, who was writing a letter:

"John, me boy, I think it's time we went to see Paircy."

"What for?" asked John, with a slight frown. "We've beaten him on his own fight. I don't want to see him for anything. He's a—"

"Chut! chut! Ye must remember ye took his wife from him—"

"His wife?"

"Yes. Ye needn't look angry. I m'ane it. He'd been brought up to consider her such, and he had a right to feel mortified at the way she was taken. Ye know we still hold something over his head—"

"I know it," interrupted John, with a slight flush; "but, confound it, you don't think I'd use it now? You mean Stover's confession. No, no, that would be too rough. I don't want to trample on him after he's down."

O'Rourke looked gratified.

"That's your human nature. Ye have generosity. But I've a mind to see whether he has any of that same quality. I'm going to see him, and show him the confession, to see how he'll act."

John Ray put down his pen.

"And what afterward? To burn it?"

O'Rourke smiled.

"Perhaps. I want to test him."

John shook his head.

"He won't stand the test. He'll quail."

"I suppose he will, but I think ye misjudge him. Will ye come?"

John rose slowly and unwillingly.

"I don't like it. It seems like triumphing over him, and as there's no good in him, I don't like to do it."

O'Rourke said nothing more till they were near the offices of the Occidental Road, when he remarked quietly:

"I think there is some good in him yet. His father was a good man and his mother a good woman. I'll test him."

John only shook his head, and followed O'Rourke into the inner office, where they found Percy, sitting alone, looking gloomy and haggard, as if he had been drinking for weeks, which was the fact.

He raised his bloodshot eyes defiantly toward them, saying:

"Well, what do you want here? I thought you'd have the good taste to keep away."

John had taken off his hat, and it was in a quiet, almost sympathetic tone that he answered:

"I would not have come of my own accord, but Mr. O'Rourke has a word to say to you. Whatever it be, I am not responsible for it; and I beg your pardon for the intrusion."

O'Rourke pulled out a paper.

"I want ye to cast your eyes over that, Mr. Paircy. It's a confession written by an unfortunate man who has been ruined by trusting to yourself and the gentleman who was president of the Diamond Car Company when you were secretary. His name is Stover."

Percy had turned pale and he could only find voice to say:

"Well, what of it?"

"He confesses that after he fled from the service of the Emerald Company with ten thousand dollars, stolen from them, he met you by appointment, and that you helped to hide him, knowing of his theft. Also there is the affidavit of one Michael Marble, that ye hired him to assassinate Mr. Ray here. These are copies of the two papers. I've the originals safe."

He put them on the desk before Percy, who stared at them blankly, and finally asked:

"Well, what of it? He didn't do it."

"He did not, because I intercepted him and hired him away from ye, by a mixture of threats and promises. Now I ask ye, what are ye going to do for Stover? Ye've ruined him, for he'll never be able to get a situation of trust again, after being found out. What will ye do for him?"

Percy set his teeth.

"Nothing. Do your worst. I'll fight you."

O'Rourke turned to John calmly.

"I told ye that ye were wrong. Ye see he has good blood in him when ye get down to it. He didn't quail."

John bowed his head.

"You were right. Will you let me say a word?"

"Certainly, my boy."

John advanced to Percy.

"Mr. Percy," he said, "I came here, as I told you, against my will; but I am glad I came now. You and I have been bitter enemies. You treated me, from the first moment I saw you, as an inferior, and I hated you for it. I fought you fairly up to a certain point, when, I admit, I took an unfair advantage of you—"

"Oh, you admit that?" interjected Percy.

"With all your cant that one man is as good as another, you couldn't meet me fairly in love, and stole my bride away on my wedding-day. Curse you forever, Ray! I loved that woman, and she might have made a better man of me. You've blasted my life, and now you come to exult over it. Do your worst. Bring on your men to swear away my character; but by Heaven, you shall not triumph! Take that, curse you!"

And as he spoke he suddenly drew a pistol, and would have fired at Ray had not the young man showed such a calm, unmoved front that Percy's nerves failed him, and he threw down the pistol, crying:

"Curse you, if I were only not such a coward I'd kill you!"

And with that he burst into sobs of mortification and rage, that showed what a wreck he had become.

John made a sign to O'Rourke, who adroitly possessed himself of the pistol, when Ray spoke again:

"You mistake, Mr. Percy—you mistake both me and yourself. I came not to triumph over you; and had you fired that shot, you would have stamped yourself a coward. Now look here."

He turned to O'Rourke.

"Give me the original confessions."

O'Rourke pointed to the table.

"There they are. They are the only ones in existence. I lied just now."

John took them up, tore them in small pieces, and threw them in the fire-place.

"Mr. Percy," he said, "I pledge you my word of honor those men shall never appear against you. I bid you good-day."

And he walked out of the office, while Percy gazed stupidly after him as if not able to comprehend what had been done, till O'Rourke observed:

"Now, Mr. Percy, show whether ye've a heart in your bosom or a stone. I'd not have done that. Good-day."

And he followed John out, leaving Percy still staring stupidly at the torn fragments in the cold fire-place as if he was intoxicated.

That evening, as John Ray and his wife were seated in the old library where they had seen so much trial and final happiness, a ring came at the bell, and James—as respectable as ever, and prouder than before of the reviving fortunes of the house—brought in a letter on a salver.

John opened it and read:

"You are a better man than I. I forgive you your wrong; forgive me mine."

"STEPHEN PERCY."

THE END.

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